

Love Bites

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Summary: Written by Kyarorain PostGS: TLA. After their adventures, the characters in Golden Sun attempt to settle down in their relationships. Attept to, anyway. Finally finished uploading. :: COMPLETED::

***Chapter 1*: Chapter 1**

Love Bites

This is the slightly edited version of Love Bites. Due to 's previous removal of this story, despite the fact that there was no reason to remove it and they used the lame excuse of "chat/real person/interactive etc" which doesn't apply and that I've had a few fics removed now, I'll take Mikaa up on his generous offer of putting it up himself. The only change is that I removed the muse skits to minimise risk. Shame, I'm quite fond of my talkative muses... Kyarorain

"Garet! Put him down now! Or else I'll have to make you!"

Isaac was rudely awoken by the sound of screeching and he tried to think about who it could possibly be. It had sounded like a woman, but exactly which woman had it been? He blearily looked out of the window and yawned at a particularly bright cloud. He immediately regretted it as the sun popped out from behind that very cloud and beamed directly in his face. Isaac winced and jumped out of bed, quietly cursing himself for forgetting to draw the curtains. Although most people would rather draw art not curtains... ahem.

Isaac rubbed his eyes as he walked towards his wall mirror and winced as he stepped on the Cloak Ball which had fallen off his dresser last night. The force of stepping on a round object and wincing as he did so caused him to land on his butt. The cross Venus Adept grabbed the Cloak Ball and

plonked it back on the dresser with a loud thump, that could easily have been confused for a body falling down the stairs, although that would make many more thumps than a black sphere being smacked down on a dresser by an offended Venus Adept.

Continuing to glare at the Cloak Ball, Isaac edged away towards the mirror and proceeded to smack into the wall since he forgot to look where he was going. Grimacing, Isaac finally managed to reach the mirror and his mouth dropped open in horror as he looked upon his normally handsome form.

"No!" wailed Isaac in horror, backing away from the mirror. "My hair's gone flat!"

The sky had fallen, chickens had started barking like dogs, Prox was a seaside vacation full of tourists with screaming kids splattered with ice cream cones, Isaac's hair had ceased to stick up in the familiar spiky manner, and Isaac knew why, for his hair gel had mysteriously gone missing. He would have to face the world without his hair gel and he was appalled at the thought.

"Nooooo!" Isaac screeched again and he ran out of his bedroom, taking the stairs three at a time and nearly landing in a heap at the bottom.

Hurricane Isaac blasted into the kitchen at countless miles per hour, and then it quickly subsided as Isaac slipped on some spilt water and landed on his backside yet again. Flaring red in the face, Isaac looked around in rising horror at the scene in front of him.

Garet, Ivan and Mia were all in his kitchen, for some reason. Garet's hair was strangely flat like Isaac's and he looked angrier than Jenna when someone told her she was on PMS,

which was usually an amazing occurrence for many people dared to boast none could match Jenna's temper and ended up becoming barbecued in the process. Gareth has holding up a wriggling Jupiter Adept by the waist, Ivan, looking unbearably guilty and desperate to get out of Gareth's grip. Mia was now staring at Isaac, with an expression that was difficult to read.

"Um, cute pyjamas, Isaac," Mia blushed as she looked upon Isaac, completely pyjama clad with bare feet. Isaac went even redder as he realised that in his rush to get to bed last night, he had put on the wrong pyjamas and was now wearing bright blue pyjamas with extraterrestrials patterned all over them, that Dora had one day got for Isaac in what he presumed was a fit of insanity.

"M-Mia!" stammered Isaac. "Wh-what are you d-doing here?" He tried to back away, but found his back was now pressed up against the cupboard and he could not go backwards any further. His eyes slid from side to side, trying to find a suitable escape route so that he could avoid any further embarrassment. Mia gave him a weird look.

"I'm staying here, remember?" Mia looked at him as if he was dumb. "You kindly offered to let me stay here, Ivan stayed at Gareth's, and Sheba and Picard are staying with Felix and Jenna. Ring a bell in your memory, or do you need..." Her eyes widened as she looked up at his head. "Isaac... your hair..."

"And I know who to blame!" Gareth boomed proudly, holding up the squealing Ivan. "Little midget boy himself is the culprit! Aren't you, Ivan?" He proceeded to give Ivan a noogie, and the Jupiter Adept squeaked in pain, for Gareth's noogies were very painful.

"What?" Isaac jumped up and almost slipped on the water again, grabbing onto the counter to steady himself. "Garet, what the heck are you talking about now? And why are you in my house?"

"I came to show you!" Garet indicated Ivan, who gulped.

"You came to show me Ivan?" Isaac nodded slowly, wondering if Garet had finally cracked. "Ok, I get it... fine..."

"For the last time!" Mia shouted in exasperation. "Put him down! You can't just go waltzing into people's houses, holding innocent people hostage!"

"Innocent?" Garet looked shocked and promptly released his grip on Ivan. Ivan dropped to the ground and shouted in pain, promptly crawling under the table with a rapid speed that surprised everybody.

"What did he do?" asked Isaac patiently. "I know you're stupid, Garet, but walking around showing people their friends is something else altogether..."

"That's not it!" thundered Garet. "That irritating little midget has been stealing our hairgel! It's true!"

"How do you know that?" asked Isaac.

"He..." Garet paused and shot an evil glance at the table, which would have shivered and slowly backed away had it not been an inanimate object. "Last night, he was muttering in his sleep and cackling about pilfering our hairgel."

Isaac and Mia stared at each other in stunned wonder for a few seconds, both of them trying to comprehend what Garet had just said. It was not the words Garet had used, for Garet

never used particularly long words, but rather what he had said.

"Garet..." Mia finally spoke, summoning up enough strength just to speak. "How do you know that Ivan was actually talking in his sleep? I thought he had a seperate room from you."

"Yes, Ivan had to take Garet's brother's room, and Aaron had to sleep in Garet's room," Isaac recalled cheerfully. "Ivan couldn't stand the smell, and the fact that there were toenails littering the floor..." He quickly trailed off as Mia gave him a disgusted look. He sighed in relief as she promptly shot an even more disgusted look at the unhygienic Mars Adept.

"It's not like that!" Garet blustered in embarrassment. "Jenna would kill me if it was... ahem... I mean... no! I was... I..."

"Were you in his room?" Isaac cautiously asked him, being careful to skirt around that particular subject. Although it would have been funny, some force out there was commanding him to steer clear of that subject and to get on with the plot, although he had his misgivings about it.

"I... yes," Garet admitted. "And I heard him talking in his sleep. Evil little Jupiter Adept!" He promptly shook his fist at the table, which, if it had been an animated object, would have filed a lawsuit against Camelot for creating characters who abused it for nothing, and against the author for making Garet be mean to it, but since the table was fortunately not an animated object, the story had to go on.

"Why were you in his room?" demanded Mia crossly. "Tell us!"

"Uhh..." Gareth realised that he was trapped. "I was... looking for my hairgel! I knew he had it somewhere, that sly little... thing!"

"Oh yeah?" Ivan crawled out from under the table and glared at him. "And why was my shampoo missing and replaced with a white bottle labelled Non-Diluted Hydrochloric Acid in black marker?"

"That wasn't me!" wailed Gareth, flushing bright red. "I want my hairgel back, and so does Isaac! Give it back at once! Or else... I'll do something bad!"

"Really?" Ivan evilly smirked. "I wouldn't count on that, Gareth, your turtle speed is simply no match for my quick speed, so..."

"Ivan," Isaac spoke in a stern voice and roughly gesticulated at his hair. "I need my hairgel back, look at my hair! How can I possibly face the world looking like this? I'm supposed to be handsome and dashing, how can I woo ladies when I look like this?"

"Woo ladies?" Mia stared directly at Isaac and he flushed even redder as he realised that Mia was in the room, and mentally kicked himself for forgetting that she was there. "What do you mean?" She demanded, her voice dropping dangerously low.

"Um... kidding!" Isaac started laughing nervously. "Just kidding, Mia, I didn't mean anything by it, I'd never do that, ever! Who needs women... no, wait, I so did not mean to..."

Mia's jaw dropped and she stared in shock at him, her eyes widening. Isaac wondered how Mia was going to react, and he immediately realised, as she slowly pulled a large axe from behind her back. Isaac looked around desperately and

gasped as he saw that Gareth and Ivan had turned into identical Mias and now the three angry looking Mercury Adepts were advancing on him, one of them holding an axe, the other a chainsaw which was turned on and whining loudly, and the third a massive mallet.

Isaac tried to back away and found himself pinned fast against the counter. Out of the corner of his eye, the table was now sitting on its side, two of its legs supporting it and the other two being used to write on a piece of very important looking parchment.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Isaac screamed as he sat up in bed, drenched with sweat. He laid a hand over his rapidly drumming heart and looked towards the window, but the curtains were drawn. The cloak ball, Isaac noted, was on the dresser and not on the floor.

"Isaac, are you ok?" A worried looking Mia appeared at Isaac's door. Isaac flushed pink and nodded embarrassedly.

"I... just had a nightmare," said Isaac lamely. He hoped that Mia would not ask what the nightmare had been about, otherwise she might go off him quicker than Ivan had jumped off that hay bale when Gareth set it on fire. "Um, Mia?"

"Yes?" Mia immediately responded, looking at him wonderingly.

"How does my hair look?" asked Isaac nervously, hoping that everything had just been a dream. He was sure he still had his hairgel, but it was best to make sure that his hair was still normal, for to greet the world with flat hair was absolutely unimaginable for him.

"It looks alright," Mia gave him a weird look, as if she would never have expected Isaac to ask a question like that before. "Just a bit messier than normal, but I suppose that's because you haven't yet brushed it."

"Oh, that's ok then," Isaac smiled in relief. "Say, Gareth and Ivan haven't dropped by today, have they?"

"Not yet, no," Mia shook her head. "Isaac, it's still early morning, they are probably having breakfast."

"Breakfast..." Isaac's stomach suddenly started rumbling. Mia giggled lightly.

"I take it you're hungry?" asked Mia, still somewhat giggly at the fact that Isaac's stomach was loudly demanding some food. Isaac eagerly nodded. "Fine, I'll go and tell your mom you want breakfast then!" Mia winked and disappeared out of the bedroom. Isaac sighed in relief, glad his dream had just been a dream, and slipped out of bed.

He quickly checked his pyjamas and were relieved that they were not the ones he had worn in the dream, then Isaac suddenly remembered that he had those pyjamas when he was a kid, until Jenna had burnt them as a prank, leaving him locked in the toilet for ages until his mother came to bring him some more. How he had wound up naked in the bathroom, he would never tell anybody. He just knew that he would never listen to Gareth when Gareth dared him anymore.

Isaac promptly kitted himself up in his usual state of wear, and carefully brushed his hair, praising it for constantly sticking up thanks to the amount of hairgel he used, and praying it would never, ever go flat. He also privately hoped that Mia would never go for him with an axe, chainsaw, or hammer. Smiling nervously, Isaac walked out of his bedroom

and headed down the stairs, ready to greet the day ahead of him.

***Chapter 2*: Chapter 2**

Love Bites

Isaac walked slowly and carefully down the stairs for some reason. He had a slight worry that his dream had been a premonition of some sort and he was not willing to find out what it was warning him of. He nervously tiptoed into the kitchen, looking about warily. There was no water on the floor waiting to make him slip up fortunately.

"Good morning, Isaac!" Mia bounced up to him with a wide cheerful grin on her face. "Are you ready to have breakfast then?" She looked at him with a deeply curious look and Isaac briefly wondered if she was on medication or something.

"I made some pancakes," Dora said brightly. "And there's syrup and lemon juice too, so sit down and eat."

"Um, I'd rather have toast," said Kyle hesitantly, he was already sitting at the table. Dora also was and she was already heaping some pancakes onto two extra plates, presumably for Isaac and Mia.

"Don't be silly, Kyle," Dora scolded him with a loving look. "You can't possibly pass up these pancakes, now eat up. They will make you strong and healthy!"

"I am already..." Kyle trailed off as he realised that he was fighting a losing battle and his wife had the upper hand as usual.

"Ooh, pancakes," Mia smiled brightly, flashing her dazzling white teeth at Isaac. "I'm looking forwards to trying some of

your mom's delicious looking pancakes, Isaac!"

"Uhh..." Isaac sat down and grimaced slightly as he looked at the pancakes. Mia sat next to him and looked eagerly at hers. Isaac leaned sideways and whispered into Mia's ear. "She always uses way too much egg when making these... I never even missed them when I was away..."

"This actually makes Prox's food look good!" said Kyle as cheerfully as possible, cutting up the pancakes laid on his plate and bringing a piece slowly towards his mouth, speared on a fork.

"What is Prox's food like then?" Dora demanded haughtily.

"Nonsense," Mia said airily and immediately heaped a load of pancakes into her mouth. As she started chewing on her mouthful, her face gradually changed into a disgusted expression and she hurriedly swallowed. "Wow... it really does..."

"Lovely, Mom," said Isaac quickly. "Prox's food is wonderful and it's great! Very nourishing..."

"Then why," asked Dora as patiently as she could manage. "Did your father come back from Prox pale, thin and clearly lacking a lot of necessary nutrients? And don't get me started on Felix's and Jenna's parents..."

"Mom!" Isaac rolled his eyes. "He wasn't that bad, you're just being melodramatic..."

"You're exaggerating, Dora," Kyle smiled and continued to eat the pancakes bravely.

"Um, I'm on a diet," said Mia hesitantly, putting her knife and fork down after finishing her first pancake. "I'm so sorry

but... I've decided pancakes are too fattening."

"You're not fat, Mia," Isaac smiled dopily at her. Mia turned to stare at him. He suddenly felt very nervous for some reason. "Uh... what?"

"Why are you saying I'm not fat?" demanded Mia. "You wouldn't say I was, unless you thought I was, and you'd be saying it to make me feel better!"

"No, Mia!" Isaac cringed. "I'm sorry, I'm really, really sorry. You aren't fat, you're beautiful!"

"We used to argue a bit when we were their age, didn't we, Kyle?" Dora smiled sappily at her husband, finding Isaac and Mia's almost argument somewhat amusing or at least memory provoking.

"Did we?" Kyle blinked as he tried to remember. "I suppose. We did have fairly long arguments, what with you being so strong-willed..."

"And you being so stubborn..." Dora looked away towards her spiky haired son who was currently in danger of being beaten up by the angry Mia. "Isaac's just like you in so many ways. Perhaps Mia's the one for him?"

Isaac and Mia promptly stopped what they were doing as they heard Dora's words. Mia flushed scarlet in the face, pushed her chair back and rushed upstairs.

"Um... I'm going too," Isaac said quickly, shoving his chair back and standing up. "Sorry, I'm just not hungry." He hurriedly turned and rushed from the house before Dora could realise that he had not touched any of the pancakes on his plate.

Isaac quickly ran, to escape the wrath of his mother when she discovered he had not touched the pancakes. His stomach was grumbling slightly, but Isaac really hated those pancakes.

However, he did not get far, before discovering one of the weirdest sights he had ever seen in his life, although it was not as strange as multi-headed dragons. Gareth was also up and outside, sitting in the grass with a paper bag on his head and holes cut through for the eyes.

"Um... Gareth?" Isaac tentatively kneeled down next to the Mars Adept and poked his shoulder. "Could you please tell me why you happen to be wearing a paper bag?"

"It's ALL Kay's fault!" lamented Gareth moodily, idly tugging at the brown paper bag and staring mournfully through the holes at his best friend. "She nicked my diary and read it..."

"Your diary, huh?" Isaac shook his head. "I suppose you left it somewhere where it would be really easy to find?" Gareth nodded slowly and Isaac tutted. "Thought so. So what does that have to do with paper bags?"

"She... well, I wrote that I wanted to propose to Jenna," Gareth whimpered. "And Kay told me that the only way I could get her attention like that was by wearing a paper bag on my head. But I don't think it's working..."

"Jenna would think you were an idiot..." Isaac shook his head. "Not that she doesn't," he privately mumbled under his breath. "You really should take the bag off, it isn't doing any favours and you look like an idiot."

"I knew it!" Gareth shouted, tearing the paper bag off and scrunching it up into a tight ball. "And if that wasn't bad enough, she threatened to tell Felix... unless..."

"Unless what?" queried Isaac, trying to imagine the methods of torture Felix might use on Gareth if he found out.

"Unless I do chores for a week," Gareth moaned, pulling his knees up to his chest and placing his head between his knees. "It just isn't fair."

"Would you rather get killed?" Isaac asked. Gareth raised his head and vehemently shook it, his eyes widening. "Then be a good boy and do your chores."

"You're no help, Isaac!" Gareth punched the ground with a broad fist. "How am I going to get Jenna to notice me?"

"Hey, you're already a couple," Isaac raised an eyebrow at him. "Does it really have to go on from there so soon?"

"But..." Gareth scratched the back of his head, as he tried to think, and immediately failed. "I just want to be happy knowing she will marry me if I ask..."

"Listen, mate," Isaac clapped a hand down on Gareth's shoulder. "Give it time, you've only been going out for, what, a year?"

"Only a year..." Gareth crossly scrambled to his feet. "Forget it, I'll deal with it myself. I'm not going to listen to my sister anymore!"

"You still gotta do those chores," Isaac also got to his feet and grinned wickedly. "Good luck, and don't get your little brother to help."

Gareth simply gave him a murderous look and slouched off to his house, mentally throwing his curses at everything in his way. Isaac silently watched him, and then his shoulders

lifted into a casual shrug, an amused smile to accompany it. He then turned around and walked over the bridge, heading down, coming to a sudden stop as he was almost run over by a red haired girl who was notorious for tempers.

"H-Hi, Jenna," Isaac gulped. "Um, how are you this morning?"

"Where's Gareth?" Jenna asked loudly. "I told him I wanted to see him this morning, but he's not here! That lazy oaf, when I catch him, I'm going to..."

"Garet can't see you this morning," Isaac nervously cleared his throat. "He's, erm, busy for a while..."

"What have you done to him?" wailed Jenna, grabbing him in a chokehold. "Tell me!"

"N-not me!" gasped Isaac, trying to pry her off. "It was his sister! Lemme go, Jenna!"

"Fine," Jenna released him and he collapsed to the ground, slightly surprised at her sudden movement. "But I'm going to find Gareth and he's going to pay for standing me up!"

"You could just drop by his house," Isaac muttered and got to his feet, brushing dirt off his knees. Jenna ignored his comment and stormed up north, heading towards Gareth's house. Isaac said a quick prayer for Gareth before going further. He was however stalled by a fellow Venus Adept.

"Isaac," Felix threw his arm around Isaac's shoulders and started forcefully walking off with him. "I need to ask you something, got a minute?"

'Like I have any choice?' Isaac thought wonderingly. "Um, yeah, what's up, Felix?"

"I am a little worried about Jenna's... relationship with Gareth," Felix told Isaac. Isaac's eyes widened as he guessed what Felix was going to talk about.

"What's that got to do with me?" asked Isaac, feigning innocence.

"Garet's your best friend, he tells you things, does he not?" Felix shot a steely look at Isaac, who meekly nodded and cursed whoever made big brothers like this. "Has he ever considered... taking it further?"

"Taking it further?" Isaac raised an eyebrow. "In what way? Do you mean marriage, or sex?"

"Marriage!" Felix said quickly, his eyes widening. "I'm not interested in sexual affairs thank you, but rest assured, if he tries to do that with her, I'll kill him very quickly."

'You'd probably do that if he married her,' Isaac thought. "So you think Gareth could be considering marrying Jenna? Where did you get that idea?"

"Well," Felix shrugged. "It's inevitable isn't it? But I just don't want them moving too fast. If he broke her heart, I'd break every bone in his body."

"Quit it with the death threats, I'm not Gareth," Isaac grumbled. "Yeah, I'd do the same, but Gareth would never do that..." He shrugged off Felix's arm and stepped in front of him, facing him squarely. "I do not know anything, but I'm sure they are not moving too fast. Alright?"

"...Fine," Felix sighed. "But I'll be watching them. Thanks for the company anyway... I'll be... off..."

"Isaac! Felix!"

The two Venus Adepts turned in shock to see Kraden at the door of his cottage beckoning to them.

"You just had to walk here," Isaac whispered into Felix's ear. "Well done."

"Oh, shut up," Felix muttered, as they both disappointedly walked towards Kraden.

"Excellent, I am so glad I caught you two!" Kraden clapped his hands together. "I have some interesting paperwork relating to the recent unleash of Alchemy that I wish to show you two, and also some extensive research which you might not have seen, pertaining to how the elements act upon the world, as we really should be learning this sort of thing, for it could make a prospective future, with all of us using brains rather than brawns-"

"We get the picture," Felix interrupted quickly. "Ok, we'll... take a look."

"That's nice, Kraden," Isaac said in a dull monotone. "I'd love to see it."

And so, the two Venus Adepts were lured into the creepy cavern of doom where none dare go for fear they will be pulled into a void of endless knowledge, otherwise known as Kraden's cottage.

***Chapter 3*: Chapter 3**

Love Bites

While the fate of Isaac and Felix at the mercy of Kraden was left in mystery, Jenna had an important mission. And the target of her mission was to find Gareth. And the best thing about it was that she knew where he was. He would of course be in his house as Isaac had suggested, and if Isaac had been lying, he would be in trouble.

"Gareth!" Jenna called, pushing the door open and slamming it against the wall and storming into the kitchen where Gareth was currently putting the breakfast dishes by the sink with a miserable expression on his face. "There you are!"

"Jenna!" Gareth almost dropped a plate and turned around in surprise. "H-hey, what's up? What are you doing here?"

"What do you think?" asked Jenna, marching up to him. Her eyes seemed to be exceptionally bright red. "Did you happen to forget we were supposed to be going out this morning? You were supposed to meet me near my house! But you never did turn up..."

"I'm sorry, Jenna," gasped Gareth, backing up against the counter. "I'm so sorry, whatever can I say to make it up to you? Is there anything I can do?"

"Well," Jenna's eyes slid towards the dishes. "You could tell me why you are committing such a bizarre act such as washing up? I never would have thought you capable of doing anything like that."

"Oh, haha," groaned Gareth. "My sister made me do chores for a week. She blackmailed me!"

"Blackmailed you?" Jenna looked at him curiously. "How did she happen to blackmail you?"

"She-" Gareth immediately realised what he was about to do and clapped his hand to his mouth, his eyes widening as he saw how close he had come to telling Jenna he wanted to marry her some day. And he did not want to wind up proposing to her while doing dishes.

"Well, well, well!" Gareth and Jenna turned around to see a young Jupiter Mage walking into the kitchen, a sadistic smirk on his face. "Garet's doing chores for a week? Looks like a prime opportunity for some teasing." He snickered.

"Aw, shut up, Ivan!" Gareth whined. "It's only because my sister blackmailed me!"

"Wonder what would happen if I... distracted you?" Ivan smiled deviously. However, his devious smile was quickly wiped off his face as he found himself being swept off his feet by a female Mars Adept and held upside down.

"Now, now," Jenna shook Ivan gently. "I really don't think you would want to do that to Gareth. You might find yourself getting quite badly hurt as a result."

"Y-you're threatening me?" groaned Ivan, as he looked at his surroundings through an upside-down perspective. "Aah! Let me go, Jenna! Let me go!"

"Uh-uh!" Jenna shook her head. "I can't let you go until you promise to leave my dear Gareth-chan alone. Do you swear you will not annoy him?"

"No!" Ivan struggled to break free, but he found that she was too strong. "Why should I?"

"Why, Ivan!" Jenna smiled sadistically. "You mean you do not know why? Because I might have to tie you up and hang you from a tree. How does that sound?"

"WHAT?" Ivan started to struggle harder. "I'm sorry, sorry, promise! Please, let me go!"

"Are you sure?" Jenna raised an eyebrow and looked at Gareth. "What do you think? Should we let this evil little mage get away or should we inflict dire punishment upon him?"

Ivan was beginning to feel very uncomfortable. Not only was his entire vision upside down, but all the blood was rushing to his head and he was getting very red in the face. He wondered if he was going to explode and wriggled feebly.

"Hmm," Gareth grinned deviously as he thought of the things he could do to Ivan. "I know! But... I think we should wait until he's... out of earshot, so we'll let him go for now.""

"You sure?" Jenna shrugged and let go of Ivan. The unfortunate Jupiter Adept fell to the floor, landing in a messy heap. "Fine, then." Ivan blearily looked around, then realised he was free and immediately bolted from the house, running for dear life.

"Now," Gareth beckoned and Jenna came very close. Gareth leaned forwards and spoke quietly, presumably plotting something evil.

"A-ha!" said yet another new voice. Gareth's elder sister strolled into the kitchen. "What do we have here? Gareth slacking off? Two little lovebirds?"

"Aw, go away, Sis!" whined Gareth unhappily. "I was working, aren't I allowed a break?"

"Breaks LATER," said Kay sternly. "Chores FIRST."

"Hey," Jenna cut in. "Why are you being so mean to poor Gareth and making him do chores for a week?"

"Hmm, well," Kay smiled deviously. "You sure you want to know? Gareth?"

"No!" Gareth ran in front of Jenna. "No! Don't let her tell you! I'll see you later!" He started pushing Jenna out of the kitchen. "Love you, bye for now!"

"GARET!" Jenna raged. "I'll get you for this!" She turned around and stormed out of the house, looking very cross. Gareth leaned on his knees and sighed in relief, not realising Jenna had pretty much threatened him.

"Oy," Kay said in a strict tone. "Chores."

Sheba stood by the river, pebbles in her hand. Every so often, she selected one and skimmed it on the water, watching it hop along the river's surface. The surface of the water sparkled in the sunlight, ripples breaking out as the sharp pebbles struck, reverberating off the water.

"AAAAH!"

The scream could be heard for miles. Sheba dropped all the stones in her hand and looked around curiously, trying to figure out where the scream had come from. Her question was immediately answered as she saw a frantic fellow Jupiter Adept running towards her, looking scared for some reason.

"Sheba!" gasped Ivan, coming to a stop a few metres away and falling to his knees, gasping for breath. "Jenna- mean- Gareth- too... hold me upside down... hang from tree..."

"Ahh, I see, Jenna and Gareth, was it?" Sheba understood perfectly. She sat down next to Ivan and patted his back. "Never mind, we can always get our own back on them somehow."

"I think THEY are plotting against ME," Ivan looked at her worriedly. "What should we do, Sheba?"

"Tell me everything," Sheba smirked. "And then we'll work it out."

"Deal?" Ivan held out his hand.

"Deal!" Sheba grabbed his hand and squeezed it tightly, causing Ivan to gasp slightly in pain, although it was not such a bad pain, just the kind of caught off guard pain that comes from being surprised.

"And the forces of a thousand men could not level the city, for when faced with wisdom, it seemed that the wise old men knew how to have a decent security and everything. It was cannon-proof, bomb-proof, everything-proof. Men tried to scale the battlements but were shocked to find the walls were covered in Vaseline and they could not climb. Twenty wise sages walked out of the city and talked, and talked to the warriors and tried to placate them into not fighting..."

Kraden droned on and on, rambling at the unfortunate Venus Adepts, telling them things they did not need to know. In fact, Isaac and Felix had got so bored that they were falling asleep, and what they were hearing was not necessarily what Kraden was saying.

"And the farts of a thousand men could not level any city, for when maced with my wisdom, it seems that the Wise One's men knew how to have a decent snack and everything. Their cannon's poof, bomb shoes, everything hoots. Men tried to nail the bad men but were stuck to find their calls were offered with vaseline, and they were not mine. Seventy kind mages stalked the city and stalked and stalked the warriors and tried to plate them into mice kings."

"R-really?" Isaac said in a slurred sleepy voice as he listened to his false version of Kraden's story. "Mice kings? Interesting..."

"Mice kings..." murmured Felix in his sleep, now dreaming that he was the king of a horde of mice and had a crown of Vaseline on his head somehow and Kraden walked around with a mace. "Mice..."

"Mice Kings?" Kraden was somewhat miffed to hear Isaac and Felix talking about such things, not yet noticing that they had fallen asleep. "Now, you must never ignore me for if you were to ignore my words of wisdom, then you might find yourself falling for the prospect of power, and trying to rule the world..."

"Everybody wants to rule the world..." Felix murmured sleepily. "The world is everybody's, everybody wants to rule... if I could rule the world..."

"Felix!" Kraden picked up a stick and rapped the table with it, causing Isaac and Felix to sit bolt upright in shock, rubbing their sleepy eyes. "Never talk of ruling the world, only bad things will come your way if you do that. Do you understand me?"

"Uh-huh," Isaac nodded. "Don't do anything stupid like rule the world."

"No, Isaac," Kraden tutted. "I simply mean that you should not be attempting to do anything such as attempting to rule the world. Terrible wars were fought to claim Alchemy and rule the world. One man will seek to rule over all, it is inevitable, but so long as we stick together, we can make sure they do not."

"How?" Felix interrupted. "Beat them up before they even think about ruling the world?"

"..." Kraden was beginning to wonder if they had been listening to a single word he had said.

"I'd be more interested in Mikasalla," Felix complained, referring to the village which he had come to believe was the most boring place on Weyard, and perhaps the most pointless, except there had been a Mars Djinni hiding there.

"Ahem," Kraden glared at him and then started off on another rambling session. This time he seemed to float off in his own dreamworld as he rambled on and on, droning like a bee. Felix was however more interested in the fact that Isaac had now taken to wandering around the cottage, examining everything.

Isaac cautiously walked up to a rack sitting on a table in front of a smoking cauldron. The rack contained tubes filled with strangely coloured liquids that bubbled, making little popping noises. He cautiously leaned over, accidentally nudging the rack closer to the cauldron, and peeked in. The cauldron was filled with a strange swirling black liquid and a sweet, musky scent hung in the air, the thick smoke washing around Isaac. His eyelids drooped, he could feel an itching in his nose.

"Ah-ah..." Isaac gulped and tried to back away but he could not do so before letting rip with an almighty sneeze. "AA-TISSSS-CHHOOOOOOO!" The force propelled him backwards, but not before he ended up knocking the liquids in the tube into the cauldron. His eyes widened as black smoke started belching out of the cauldron and it made hissing noises like a rabid cat which has had its tail stepped on one too many times.

"Run!" yelled Felix, jumping to his feet and knocking his chair back. He turned and fled, running out of the cottage for dear life.

"HOLY COW!" Isaac screamed, turning and running from the cottage, doing a magnificent leap off the hill and rolling over the ground, landing next to Felix. They sat on the ground, wordlessly watching Kraden's cottage as the roof went flying and pink smoke floated upwards. Then Kraden came walking out.

It took all of the Venus Adepts' willpower not to laugh at the sight of Kraden. He now had spiky greenish hair and ragged clothes which made him look like a punk. He came slowly down the steps outside his home, giving Isaac and Felix ultra severe glares.

"It was an accident, Kraden!" Isaac protested. "I was just looking around..."

"I shall be telling your parents of this," said Kraden in an ominous tone. "And you, Felix? Why did you not try to stop Isaac?"

"I didn't know he was going to sneeze," complained Felix. "I'm not a Jupiter Adept now, am I?"

"That's it!" Kraden snapped. "You two can come here tomorrow morning early to clear up the mess you two caused. If not, then I shall make sure your parents inflict dire punishment on you!"

"Awww..." Felix and Isaac groaned in unison, then they noticed a dangerous gleam in Kraden's eyes and jumped to their feet, shaking in fright.

"OKAY, KRADEN!" Isaac said in a loud voice, turning and running.

"Alright, Kraden," Felix hastily turned and followed, wondering if he could possibly worm himself out of this terrible situation.

"Whew, that was a close one..." Isaac muttered as he headed towards his house. He wondered if he could fake a fatal illness or something. Perhaps he could blame it on the pancakes he had that morning, but then his devious plan was quickly dashed as he remembered that he had not eaten any that morning. "Aw, darnit!"

***Chapter 4*: Chapter 4**

Love Bites

"Boys!" Jenna screamed, kicking a stone and venting her fury on the unfortunate ground. "Men! Why must we put up with them? They are so annoying!"

"What's the matter, Jenna?" Mia approached her with a concerned look on her face.

"Men," said Jenna simply.

"Ah," Mia understood perfectly. "And the man you happen to be referring to would be Gareth?"

"Exactly," Jenna fumed. "And his dumb big sister went and roped him into doing chores, so he can't spend any time with me. It's just unfair."

"I haven't talked to Isaac much lately," Mia sighed. "We have the occasional conversation, but... today, he just disappeared. I wonder where he got to."

"Ivan is being evil too," Jenna said ominously. "Me and Gareth have got plans for Ivan."

"Oh, I see," Mia looked slightly nervous at the thought of it. "Don't... kill him or anything."

"What's this about killing?" A Lemurian popped out from behind a tree, causing Mia and Jenna to jump several feet in the air out of fright.

"Ah! Typical men!" Jenna shouted in frustration. "Picard, if you wish to join our conversation, could you please do it in a

less frightening manner please?"

"If you want Jenna to tell you," Mia said to Picard. "You must swear not to tell Ivan any of it."

"I have not decided yet," Jenna frowned as she thought about it. "When me and Gareth get together, then we should be able to discuss a plan."

"This is Gareth you're talking about," Picard reminded her. "Is he really top-notch when it comes to planning?"

"Where Ivan is concerned, Gareth comes up tops," Jenna smirked deviously. "So me and Gareth are going to be having a lot of fun."

"You had better be careful," Mia interrupted. "If Ivan knows you and Gareth are plotting against him, he might team up with Sheba and plot against you."

"Plotters against plotters," Picard smiled dreamily. "What a wonderful situation this could turn out to be. It might be very interesting."

"Hey, here comes Isaac!" Mia exclaimed, seeing the familiar blonde haired Venus Adept walk up, accompanied by another Venus Adept with long brown hair tied back in a ponytail.

"Hi, Mia," Isaac grinned as cheerfully as he could manage. "Nice day today, huh?"

"I guess," Mia sighed. Isaac looked at her quizzically, wondering what he had said to make her upset.

"Where have you and Isaac been?" Jenna immediately pounced on her brother, determined to grill him until she

had all the answers that she needed.

"Up at Kraden's," Felix responded quickly.

"Wow, you like Kraden that much, huh?" Picard teased.

"Shut it, Picard," Felix jokingly punched him in the arm.

"Why were you at Kraden's?" Jenna elevated an eyebrow.

"We were kidnapped," Felix told her.

"Kidnapped?" Mia's mouth dropped open and she hugged Isaac tightly. "Oh, poor Isaac-chan! Are you alright?"

"More or less," Isaac sighed.

"What has happened to get you down?" Picard asked. "Did Kraden book you two in for an all day lecture tomorrow or something?"

"Worse," Felix shook his head. "It's something we can't sleep through."

"Felix!" Jenna exclaimed. "Tell us!"

"Isaac accidentally blew up Kraden's cottage," Felix explained. "Kraden was not very happy and told us to come to his cottage early tomorrow morning and clean it up. If we do not, then he will make our parents inflict 'dire punishment' upon us."

"I would have done the same if I were you," said Picard sympathetically. "At least it got you out of his lectures, hmm?"

"But we'll have to clean up," Isaac moaned.

"What is it with men and cleaning up lately?" Jenna rubbed her temples. "This must a sign of the Apocalypse. Men doing chores!"

"Hey!" Felix, Isaac and Picard exclaimed. Jenna and Mia chuckled.

"Come closer, girls," Picard said ominously, his hand glowing blue. "Just a little closer."

However, Jenna and Mia took to the other direction instead, running as fast and far as they could go before Picard inflicted dire punishment upon them by dousing them.

"Women," Isaac rolled his eyes.

"Can't live without them," Felix reminded him.

"That's true," Isaac admitted.

"Besides, we can all tell you like Mia," Picard said slyly.

"Shouldn't you two be a couple yet?" Felix teased.

"We are just friends!" Isaac however went beetroot red in the face. To tell the truth, he had not put much thought to it lately. He was not sure if Mia felt the same way about him as he about her...

"And she's staying at your house too," Picard smirked.

"Only because there's no space at Felix's and Gareth's houses!" Isaac protested.

"Sure," Felix scoffed. "Well, I don't care, so long as Jenna and Gareth don't go getting together too quickly..."

"..." Isaac decided that now was a very good time to get away and immediately fled before Felix could start on that topic which he decided he had heard enough of today.

"What is up with him?" Picard asked.

"No clue," Felix shrugged carelessly, watching Isaac's retreating figure.

"So, are you going to get a woman someday?" asked Picard, looking at Felix.

"I dunno," Felix didn't seem so interested. "Maybe someday. I just don't see the rush. I'm only 18."

"Just don't wind up like me," Picard warned. "I am somewhere in the hundreds and still a bachelor."

Felix looked at him wordlessly, and then an involuntary shudder shook his body. To be like Picard would probably be worse than listening to a day long lecture by Kraden without breaks. Or... Felix shook his head and broke off his line of thoughts. There was still plenty of fish to be found in the sea anyway.

Finally, an imaginary banner was hoisted high, imaginary trumpets blasted and imaginary bells clanged, and an imaginary drumroll sounded. Garet had somehow finished his chores. The kitchen had been an easy task, and cleaning his bedroom was easy. All he had to do was kick stuff under his bed and hope that nobody found out. He walked out of his house with a pleased grin on his face.

"Hey! Garet!" Jenna ambushed him, looping her arms around his neck and smooching him, lifting her legs up so that she was hanging off him.

"Hey, Jenna," Gareth continued to walk with Jenna still clinging onto his back. "I finally did my chores!"

"Excellent, that's one day off your week," Jenna beamed. Gareth could not help groaning as he remembered the length of time ahead of him with chores to do and his evil sister at his back with a whip to make him work faster. The very thought made him whimper.

"Now," Jenna released her grip on her boyfriend and walked by his side. "We need to plot against Ivan."

They took a pleasant spot by the river and immediately noticed Ivan and Sheba sitting on the other side of the river. It looked as if Ivan and Sheba were plotting evil things.

"Hey, Ivan and Sheba are together," Gareth pointed out, glaring evilly at the Jupiter Adepts.

"Ivan and Sheba must be plotting against us," said Jenna urgently, then her face twisted into a very evil grin. "So lets plot against both of them!"

And so, as the sun seemed to move very slowly through the sky, four people sat, two on either side of a river, plotting devious things against each other and constantly throwing evil looks at each other.

"Dad," Isaac spoke up as he saw his father sitting on a stone set into the ground to act as a seat, whittling away at a stick. He sat next to Kyle. "Um, you and Mom..."

"Yes?" Kyle looked at his son. "What about me and your mother?"

"How did you two get together?" Isaac asked interestedly.

"Ah, now I could never forget that," Kyle said dreamily. "Your mother was a very beautiful woman. Not that she isn't now. And I guess getting together was inevitable."

"Daaaaad..." Isaac pleaded. "I need to know..."

"Oh, have you got a prospective woman in your life then?" Kyle grinned. "Mia caught your eye?"

"Maybe," Isaac admitted. "But I don't know how to... make her love me..."

"Isaac, son," Kyle shook his head, putting a hand on Isaac's shoulder. "You don't MAKE a woman love you. You cannot make them feel differently. But you can lead them to fall in love with you as they can do the same to you."

"Right..." Isaac looked confused though.

"Now listen to a tale, my son," Kyle spoke. "Of how your parents got together."

Mia trudged sadly through the village, not caring much for where she went. For some reason she was feeling a bit sad. Her footsteps carried her to Isaac's house and she walked in, closing the door behind her. Dora was currently bustling around the kitchen, preparing lunch. At the moment she was cutting up carrots, and her knife came down on the board repeatedly with a soft thwack noise each time.

"Um, Ma'am?" Mia spoke hesitantly, looking around at the food. It seemed that it was going to be meat and vegetables for lunch, she noted.

"Oh, Mia," Dora looked up and placed the knife down next to her half chopped carrot. "I'm just preparing lunch. I wonder where Kyle and Isaac have got to, I hope they aren't late..."

"Can I talk to you for a bit?" Mia asked, clasping her hands together.

"Well, okay then," Dora wiped her hands on her apron. "Lunch can wait a bit. Lets go and sit down." She led Mia to the table and they sat down on opposite chairs. "Now then, what do you want to talk about?"

"It's about... men," Mia said the last word meaningfully, stressing it as she spoke.

"Men, hmm?" Dora nodded wisely. "Some men can be the start of many problems, can't they? Like that Garet, smashing my roof in all the time. But that aside, what is the problem at the moment?"

"Well, I like this man..." Mia said guardedly.

"Oh, I see, you've got your eye on my son," Dora said brightly, noticing Mia blush. "It's nothing to be ashamed of, Isaac is a very good boy and I am sure he would make you very happy."

"Yes, I know he would," Mia nodded eagerly. "But the problem is that I don't know how to... well, how we're going to get together. I'm kind of worried about it. How did you and Isaac's dad get together?"

"Ah, me and Kyle," Dora smiled. "It's a story that will warm your heart. Sit still and listen, and I will spin you a fine story."

"So, have you got your eye on anybody?" Picard asked, still not willing to drop the subject of relationships.

"No," Felix sat by the river, pulling up weeds and trying to avoid the subject but it did not look like Picard was going to give up sometime soon.

"I see," Picard paced back and forth. "Now, Felix, there are many beautiful girls in this village, you know. It cannot be that hard to find someone, surely?"

"Who cares?" Felix tossed the weeds into the river and brushed his gloves where they had been stained slightly. "I still have plenty of time."

"You need to get with somebody," Picard protested. "What about Gareth's sister? What?" He noticed Felix give him an incredulous look. "Wait, if your sister's with Gareth already, then... hey! Come back!"

Felix walked off, desperate to get away from the annoying Lemurian before he drove him around the bend with what he considered stupidity. He came to a sudden stop however as he noticed the strangest sight he had ever seen before.

"What is it?" Picard asked, looking over Felix's shoulder. His eyes widened as he saw it. Gareth and Jenna were sitting at one side of the river, whispering to each other and shooting evil glares at Ivan and Sheba who were also sitting at the opposite side of the river, whispering to each other and shooting evil glares at Gareth and Jenna.

"I fear," Felix spoke. "That they have gone absolutely crackers."

"I fear so too," Picard clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Now lets get back to your house and see if lunch is ready. It seems like they are somewhat preoccupied with other business."

"Definitely," Felix turned and they walked away from the strange scene which was just the beginning of what could end up being an Adept war.

***Chapter 5*: Chapter 5**

Love Bites

"That's it?" Isaac and Mia both asked simultaneously as Kyle and Dora finished telling their tales. Even though they were not in the same room even. Mia was still in the kitchen listening to Dora, while Isaac had been outside the whole time listening to Kyle.

"That's it," Dora said, looking pleased with herself as she stood up. "Now I hope you'll be able to work the same charm over Isaac. You would make a lovely daughter in law."

Mia went bright red and quickly excused herself, hurrying out of the house before Isaac's mother could manage to embarrass her any further. She hadn't even told Isaac her feelings, let alone considered marriage. Although Mia certainly would not mind marrying Isaac.

"Nice tale, Dad," Isaac said truthfully, actually having enjoyed hearing it but now wondering how it could possibly help him get together with Mia.

"Yes, it is..." Kyle got that faraway look in his eyes, dropping the stick which only a short while ago he had been whittling with a knife. Isaac hurriedly got up and walked away.

Isaac and Mia were both walking towards each other, neither of them any clearer on the situation than they were, and both lost in their thoughts as they tried to figure out what to do. In fact, they did not know they approached each other until they collided.

"What are you- oh, Isaac!" Mia flushed even brighter red.

"Sorry," Isaac grinned awkwardly, also becoming red. They both saw each other's expression on their faces and then they started chuckling softly.

"No, I'm sorry," Mia managed to speak through her giggles. "I should have looked where I was going. I was talking to your mother."

"Really?" Isaac looked interested. "About what?"

"Oh, um," Mia paused, trying to think how to tell him. She didn't want to tell him that she was trying to figure out how to gain him as a boyfriend, that would completely give it away. "She was telling me about how she and your dad got married and stuff like that."

"Wow," Isaac's eyes widened. "That's funny! My dad was telling me that too!"

"Well, I guess it's something special to them," Mia explained. "So it makes sense they would want to recount it to other people, especially you since you are their son. I guess your mom just thought I might like to hear it too."

"Yeah... is it nearly lunchtime yet?" Isaac asked, trying to swerve away from the topic before the truth of his feelings for Mia came out.

"Oh, yes," Mia remembered. "That's right, your mom's just preparing lunch right now."

"Good, I'm hungry," Isaac grinned.

"Sometimes you sound just like Gareth," Mia said wonderingly, shaking her head. Isaac found himself

wondering if that was meant to be an insult or a compliment.

For Felix and Picard, lunch was already over. Jenna and Sheba had actually managed to drag themselves away from the riverbanks, and so had Garet and Ivan. Now Picard was once again bugging Felix about getting a girlfriend.

"Picard, please, just DROP it," said Felix wearily, wondering if he would get away with concussing Picard with a tree branch, then deciding against it. "I am not in the mood for looking for a girlfriend."

"Maybe you just need help..." Picard came to a stop and glanced to one side warily. They had been walking north towards Mt. Aleph, the stubborn mountain inexplicably sitting there. Picard had seen something. Felix curiously looked but he did not see anything of interest.

"What is it?" Felix asked finally, half hoping that maybe Picard had just fallen asleep standing up with his eyes open. It would certainly be a relief and he could just run for it and leave the Lemurian there.

"There is somebody there," Picard pointed to a large tree that stood at the mouth of the river. "They are hiding behind the tree. I'll go and see who it is." He quietly crept up to the tree. Felix looked at Picard scornfully, wondering why the Lemurian felt that he had to creep about like that. It wasn't as if Valeans were rabid cannibals that liked to feast on visitors. Actually, Valeans normally kept to themselves when visitors were at large but since there weren't any at the moment, people could do as they wished. There was that dumb law that said not to use Psynergy in front of outsiders (which eight certain Adepts had broken countless times, not to mention two scary Mars Adepts from Prox and a Jupiter

Adept who was the sister of a certain other Jupiter Adept) yet some people knew that non Adepts could not see Psynergy or who was using it and had in the past used that to their benefit. Felix winced as he remembered the time he was standing in the inn with a mask on his face and Gareth had tried to set his cape on fire.

Picard was beckoning, Felix realised, so he hurriedly walked over and looked at whatever it was that Picard was so excited about. Felix saw a person standing with their back to him, looking up at a higher part of the village as if contemplating climbing up. The person had long flowing blue hair which swayed gently in the wind. Their clothes looked somewhat worn and dirty, even ripped so he could not tell if they were wearing trousers or a dress.

"Stay there," Picard whispered, placing a hand on Felix's shoulder then removing it and tiptoeing up to the bluehaired person. Felix froze, wondering what insane thing it was that Picard was about to do.

"Excuse me, ma'am," Picard tapped the person on the shoulder. "That guy's looking for a girlfriend, would you talk to hi- uh oh..." The person had just turned slowly to glare at Picard and Picard now definitely knew it was not a woman. Felix had already dodged behind the tree and was contemplating a rapid escape and trying to figure out how to do it without being seen.

"I am NOT a girl," Alex icily spoke, folding his arms across his chest. "I am one hundred percent male, even if it might not always seem that way at times. Okay?"

"What are you doing here?" Picard hurriedly changed the subject before the embarrassment got any worse. "And I don't remember your clothes looking that bad."

"I was trapped upon Mt. Aleph for a while," Alex decided not to explain why. "I have spent a long time climbing down, living only on water thanks to my Psynergy, and when I reached the bottom at last, I got some fruit nearby. Now that I am fully satisfied, I am trying to find a way out of the village without being seen."

"Why don't you just warp?" Picard asked. "And why do you look like you've been savaged by fifty Kirin summons?"

"I got into a scuffle with the Wise One," said Alex dejectedly. "And I haven't got much Psynergy anyway. I only had enough to heal myself a little, and then allow myself a few water breaks to quench my thirst. I am lucky to be alive."

"I see..." Picard exhaled. "You're still the same, always talking about yourself." He turned away, ignoring Alex's annoyed retort and joined Felix on the other side of the tree. "Tree bonding, are you?"

"No," Felix replied scornfully, grabbing Picard by his shirt. "Don't you DARE do something like that again! That was extremely embarrassing!"

"Only trying to help," Picard said sulkily, prying off Felix's hands and dusting down his ruffled shirt.

"Just one problem there," Felix said scathingly. "Wrong gender."

"I apologise," Picard held up his hands and tried to look innocent. "I thought Alex was a girl from the back, I just did not recognise him."

"Huh," Felix turned away and then he heard something that sounded suspiciously like Alex whining. Felix peered around

the tree and saw Alex cursing. It appeared that Alex could not climb up and he was not very happy.

"You have two choices," Felix said loudly so that Alex heard him. "One, go the normal way, two, use the river instead."

"Fine," Alex glowered at him, and then he jumped into the river. "I'll swim!" And so, he did, disappearing into the distance. The next thing Felix and Picard heard was a scream.

"He must have fallen down one of the waterfalls," Picard guessed.

A few minutes later, a bedraggled, half-drowned and severely disgruntled Alex booked himself into the inn and disappeared upstairs, seeking solace from the 'evil Valeans'. He was far too humiliated to face the world after losing to a big rock, then being mistaken for a girl, THEN having a run-in with a waterfall. Or perhaps, a swim-in rather.

After hours of plotting with a lunch break in between, Gareth & Jenna had come up with nothing new, no evil plots against Ivan and Sheba. Jenna had suggested taking their diaries, but Gareth felt queasy when he thought of that idea, after what had happened when Kay stole his own diary so the idea was quickly forgotten.

As for Ivan and Sheba, Sheba had come up with a very clever plan.

"This," Sheba smirked evilly as she held up a bottle of auburn hairdye. "This is temporary hairdye which washes out after a while. I shall dye Jenna's hair with this!"

"Cool," Ivan smirked and considered dying Gareth's hair too, but then he thought it would be cute if Gareth and Jenna had

matching hair, and Gareth's was already auburn anyway. "You do that. As for Gareth... I have no clue what I'll do to him. Maybe just put a bucket of water on his bedroom door."

"Excellent," Sheba's grin widened. "Well, we shall meet tomorrow and see the results of our indigenous planning. I shall see you later, Comrade Ivan."

"Later," Ivan raised an eyebrow. "... 'Comrade' Sheba."

Night fell and the whole of Vale was fast asleep except for two evil little Jupiter Adepts, creeping around the houses in the darkness. Sheba did not have to creep very far since she was sharing a room with Jenna. She had of course hidden the hairdye and pretended nothing was going on, being ultra passive in front of Jenna and trying her best not to give anything away. It worked.

Sheba quickly worked, pulling a towel under Jenna's head and sloshing hairdye all over Jenna's hair, staining the towel in the process, but it was only a towel. She then rubbed it in carefully and once it looked good enough, Sheba hastily removed the towel and escaped to the bathroom to wash away the evidence. She hoped she would wake up before Jenna did in the morning, Sheba knew how bad Jenna could be about her hair.

Ivan did not have to do much work either. He simply went into the bathroom, filled up a bucket of cold water and opened Gareth's door, put the bucket down, got a chair, got onto it (Of course, being a blonde midget has never helped Ivan) and carefully placed the bucket on the door. With any luck, Gareth would push the door further open and get properly soaked. Smirking evilly, Ivan got down off the chair, removed it, and hurried back to his bedroom, praying that somehow he would wake up before Gareth just in case.

Unfortunately, Ivan did not see the hulking shape looming up behind him. The only indication he got was the sudden sound of breathing coming closer. Ivan turned and looked into those dark brown eyes, saw the fiery red hair illuminated in the moonlight and he almost screamed for he had just been caught and there was no escape, not from those suspicious eyes, not from that twisted snarl.

"Ivan!" The apparition hissed, looking very grumpy indeed. "What are you doing?"

"I was only going to the bathroom," Ivan was shaking in his boots as Kay loomed over him, looking very evil indeed. He was telling the truth, he just had not bothered to tell her why he was going. "What about you?"

"I got up to get a glass of water," Kay spoke in a strangely witchy voice, although it could just have been the fact that it was nighttime that gave her voice that effect. "If I find you're up to mischief, little boy, then you will... join Gareth doing chores."

"Ok," Ivan gulped and then thought of something. He immediately widened his eyes and looked ultra adorable, holding his hands as if he was begging, and smiled angelically, talking in a wheedling voice. "Please, could you not tell Gareth that I was lurking around here at night? He might get funny ideas, he is strange like that."

"I see," Kay stared at him suspiciously but decided to say nothing of it. "Fine, I'll not tell him, but I want you to get to bed before you go around waking up the entire household! Now, go!"

Ivan turned and fled back to the safety of his bedroom and crawled into his bed, feeling extremely thankful that it

hadn't been Gareth he'd encountered in the hallway. That would have messed things up severely. His plots could even be sprung. He wondered how Sheba was doing with dying Jenna's hair and hoped it was going well.

And so, every person in Vale was asleep, all of them unaware that the first move had been made towards the oncoming Adept War. Felix and Isaac were having nightmares of the torture they would suffer tomorrow when they went over to clean up Kraden's cottage, Mia was dreaming that she was getting married to Isaac, Ivan and Sheba dreamt they were pursued by angry Gareth and Jenna. Gareth of course dreamed of food, while Jenna dreamed that her hair was under attack by some mysterious force and she was trying to defend it. Picard dreamt that Alex was a girl (Lets not go there...) and everybody else dreamed ordinary things they dreamt every night anyway.

***Chapter 6*: Chapter 6**

Love Bites

"Rise and shine, Felix, rise and shine!"

Felix rolled over in his bed, groaning aloud and trying to block out the sound roaring in his head. It was the awful sound of a certain Lemurian waking him up. Picard was opening the curtains, but there was little light coming through since it was still so early.

"Picard..." Felix sat up with an effort and yawned wildly, shooting a tired glare at Picard who was now grinning evilly, his hand glowing blue as if he was about to cast Water Psynergy. "What the hell are you DOING? Nobody gets up at this time! Let me get back to sleep, you evil person!" He promptly fell back on the pillow and buried his face in it.

"Uh-uh," Picard shook his head and sharply pulled Felix's pillow out from under his head. Felix yelped in complaint and reached out for the pillow, but Picard held it away from him. "Don't you remember what you've got to do this morning?"

"Oh yes, I know what I have to do this morning," Felix spoke in a sinister tone, pulling his duvet up around his shoulders and somehow managing to rest his head on a corner of the duvet. "I have to devise a way to get rid of you without anybody knowing after you've just committed the heinous crime of waking me up too early."

"No, wrong," Picard wagged his finger and then he pulled the duvet as well. Felix exclaimed as he promptly hit the floor and glared at Picard who was now holding the duvet

hostage. "That's not it at all. You may recall blowing Kraden's cottage up yesterday. In fact, because you blew his cottage up, you and Isaac are required to go to his cottage early today morning to clean it up or face dire punishment. I believe now would be a very good time to go and do it."

"I hate you," Felix scowled and picked himself off the floor, going to pick out some clothes to wear today. "I am never going to forgive you for waking me up. Why do I have to go and clean up Kraden's cottage? Isaac blew it up, not me! I am perfectly innocent... this stinks."

"Yes, I am quite sure," Picard nodded sagely. "Well, have a nice time at Kraden's, I shall be going back to bed now." As he spoke, he threw himself back on his bed and pulled the duvet over his head, drifting off to dreamland. Felix glared evilly at the lump as he got dressed, dreading the prospect of cleaning up Kraden's cottage, but he just couldn't think of any way to get out of it without being punished.

"Isaac! Isaac! It's time to get up!" Isaac blearily opened his eyes and wondered who was trying to get him up. He was so tired, he just didn't feel like he could possibly stay awake any longer than five seconds. Through his hazy vision, he saw a blue-haired angel.

"I'm seeing angels," Isaac mumbled thickly, rolling around so that his face was in the pillow. "G'night..."

"Isaac," Mia spoke again, sterner this time. "You have got to get up, and calling me an angel isn't going to put me off however sweet that was. Although I don't think I'd really want to be an angel, they are supposed to be dead you know."

"Huh?" Isaac turned over again, staring sleepily up at Mia. "What? Why do I have to get up?"

"Kraden," Mia said simply, and she couldn't help feeling sorry as she saw the horrified expression that was on Isaac's face. He looked so pitiful, she considered just going around to Kraden's and knocking him out for a while, but she wasn't sure if she could do that without killing him since he really was just a frail old man.

"Oh no..." Isaac whimpered. "Uh, Mia, I don't feel so good... I think I shouldn't go, because I might throw up all over the floor or something and I don't think Kraden would be very happy. I should stay here and rest."

"Poor baby," Mia tutted pityingly and then she glowed with Psynergy, holding her hands out towards Isaac. Her hands glowed blue and Isaac watched in horror as a little fairy danced over him and showered him with sprinkles. Mia had just used Ply psynergy, a healing Psynergy, so now Isaac really had no excuse. "You feeling better now?" Mia asked hopefully.

"Yeah," Isaac nodded, sitting up and smiling fakely so that Mia's feelings would not be hurt. She had done it in her best interests so it wouldn't be fair to act displeased with her for it. "Thanks, Mia... well, I guess I'd better get ready and go to Kraden's even though I don't really want to."

"I know," Mia grinned and then she turned, walking towards the door. Before she was completely out of the room, she looked back over her shoulder and winked. "Good luck, Isaac, don't let the scholar bite." Then she was gone.

"Uh... okay..." Isaac blinked in confusion and then he got out of bed and grabbed his clothes, hurriedly getting dressed. If he had to go and clean Kraden's cottage, then he might as well get an early start as Kraden had requested. The earlier he and Felix started, the earlier they would be finished.

Isaac just hoped that Felix was going too, because it wouldn't be fair if he had to do it alone.

"Ahh, I am very pleased to see you two," said Kraden ominously, sitting on his burnt doorstep. "These hours residing in a roofless establishment has left me in a state of cold that is almost unbearable and..." He continued to go on and on, his words of doom flung at the two miserable, shivering Venus Adepts, both of them blinking tiredly and wanting to go straight back to bed rather than listening to Kraden. "... so now you two should proceed to begin. Get to it or else I shall be going to your parents."

"Uh-huh, okay," Isaac nodded quickly, unable to stifle a yawn and then he clapped his hand to his mouth, his eyes widening. "Oops... I'm not tired at all."

"That is a pity," Kraden said, giving Isaac a stony glare which only made Isaac shiver even more and wonder why it would be a pity to Kraden if he was not tired. Unless of course getting him and Felix up had been a way of Kraden's to torture them. It made perfect sense.

"Well, we should start now," said Felix brightly, grabbing Isaac's arm and forcefully pulling him into the ruined cottage. "This place will be looking spick and span in no time at all... oh, and roofless too, but we can't really do anything about that."

"Well, just tidy up," Kraden ordered grouchily, sitting on a stool and watching Felix and Isaac intently. They realised he was going to be watching them the whole time and possibly talking a lot too, and that thought alone was intensely horrifying.

'Oh no, anything but that!' Isaac started dropping glass and burnt paper and random other bits of rubbish on the floor

into the bins that were prepared specially. 'I want my mommy!'

Felix sighed and grabbed a mop and pail of water. He started mopping up the spilt liquids that decorated the floor, actually somewhat entranced by all the different colours they came in, and wondered what they were, but it probably wasn't a good idea to ask Kraden since he would only go and name the elements and their molecular structures and proton and atomic numbers or whatever all that Chemistry gobbledegook was about.

"NOOOOOOOOOO!!!" Jenna howled in rage as she looked in the bathroom mirror, staring in horror at her reflection. Her hair was a bright auburn colour now, looking just like Gareth's hair, and it was mortifying. "WHO TOUCHED MY HAIR?" Jenna screamed again, running her hands over her hair protectively as if that would wash the nasty orange colour away and revert it to normal.

In the not so far distance, Jenna heard the front door slamming and then she had a very good idea of just who had committed the heinous crime of dying Jenna's hair. It was bad enough to touch Jenna's hair, but they had dyed it as well and now she was extremely mad.

"SHEBA!!!" Jenna howled. Of course it was Sheba, that explained why she had gotten up before Jenna and Jenna knew that because when she got up, Sheba was not in her bed, so Sheba must have just made a quick getaway to try and avoid Jenna's wrath. Well, Jenna wasn't going to rush out with orange hair, not like this. There was no way she was going to let Sheba win.

Jenna rushed to her bedroom and proceeded to pull her clothes on in a rush, then she ransacked her wardrobe,

pulling out a little green beret style hat. It was a bit odd looking, but anything was better than facing the world with orange hair. Jenna scrunched her hair together, making sure that every newly orange strand was in place then she tucked it under her beret and fixed it securely on her head. If that little green hat came off, Jenna swore that she would burn it... and then put it in Sheba's bed or something. Maybe while still burning. While Sheba was in the bed.

Jenna strode out into the hallway, whistling a jaunty tune as if pretending that nothing was wrong, and she almost bumped into Picard who was coming in the opposite direction.

"Good morning, Jenna," Picard said cheerfully. "Oh, and I love your cute hat, it really suits you. You should wear it more often."

"Shut up and die," Jenna growled, shoving him aside and marching off towards the front door. She was in a terrible mood and in no mood to talk about her hat.

"Touchy," Picard raised an eyebrow. "Well, it's probably just her time of the month or something." He was about to go to the bathroom, then something stopped him and he frowned in confusion. "Why is Jenna wearing a hat when she's never worn one before?"

Ivan nervously tiptoed to Gareth's door and peered through the gap he had left. He saw that Gareth was just getting up, blinking sleepily and yawning and looking like he wanted to go straight back to sleep. Ivan sighed in relief and then he darted off speedily in case Gareth saw him or something.

Gareth thought he had heard something like a Jupiter Adept running along the landing, but he decided to think nothing of it and eased himself out of bed, stretching himself

thoroughly then proceeding to get dressed. It was day 2 of his chores week, and he was definitely not looking forwards to it, but it was probably better than Isaac and Felix having to clean up Kraden's cottage.

'I'm so hungry,' Gareth thought as he lumbered towards the door, thinking of breakfast and smiling as he hoped that it was something good. 'I want my breakfast... mmmm... I want pancakes...' Gareth of course did not look up, which was a big mistake, because if he had then he would have known to squeeze through the gap and not pull the door wide open. Of course, he pulled the door wide open and promptly found himself drenched with a bucket on his head.

"IVAN!" Gareth roared, pulling the bucket off his head and throwing it furiously, shouting a few rude words. "I'm going to kill that evil midget even if it's the last thing I do!" He was not very happy at all, now he was wet and Gareth did not like being wet at all. Even worse, he still had to do his chores, he knew that Kay would not think that being wet was a suitable excuse to get out of doing chores, she would probably try to roast him dry or something.

"Garet!" Jenna hollered, strolling into the kitchen where Gareth was currently mopping the floor, an unpleasant task considering that Ivan had been careful to get some food on the floor. Gareth put the mop against the table and spread his arms wide, but Jenna was not in the mood for hugs. "Look!" She pulled off her hat and let her newly auburn hair fall down to her shoulders.

"Wow..." Gareth's mouth dropped open and he stared fascinatedly at Jenna as if she had grown an extra head or something. "Why did you dye your hair? I liked it better before."

"I didn't dye it!" Jenna screamed, clenching her fists angrily and looking so furious she almost broke a new record. "It was that evil Sheba, she dyed my hair in the night or something!"

"Ivan's been evil too!" Gareth cracked his knuckles. "You know what he did? He put a bucket on my door and I got soaked this morning! Evil, evil midget... if he was here, he would be dead right now."

"Hey," Kay strolled into the kitchen and stopped. She looked at Jenna, then Gareth, then at Jenna again and shook her head with an exasperated sigh. Jenna glared at her evilly as if daring her to even mention her hair. "Goodness," Kay blinked and stared at Jenna even more. "Look, Gareth, Jenna, I know that you two are in love and probably will get married someday or something..." Gareth paled visibly as Kay brought up the subject, and he prayed that she wouldn't be evil enough to let his biggest secret out. After all, he was doing the chores, wasn't he? "But now you've got to have matching hair?" Kay sighed again and threw her arms up in the air. "I give up, you are officially the craziest couple out there." She strode out of the house, giggling loudly.

"Huh!" Jenna tucked her hair back under her beret and sulked. "That wasn't funny. Your sister is so mean."

"Yeah," Gareth chuckled nervously. "She's evil."

"Married?" Jenna rubbed her brow with index finger and thumb as if she was having a headache or something. "Seriously, are we going to get married soon? Is she kidding?"

"Hahahaha..." Gareth laughed and grabbed the mop, chuckling as he started vigorously knocking aside chairs

with it and collided with the table, rubbing his head.
"Hahahahaha..."

"You are so crazy, Gareth," Jenna told him and then she too left the house, hellbent on figuring out how to get her own back on Sheba, while Gareth was now thinking about how he could get his own back on Ivan.

"Ahh," Isaac sighed in relief as he was finally excused from Kraden's cottage, along with Felix. The cottage was still roofless but at least it was clean and tidy. Kraden had considered giving Isaac and Felix a lecture, but then decided he didn't want to put himself in danger again so he opted out, although it was dismaying to think he had missed a prime chance to lecture people about useless things as he always did.

"I never want to do that again," Felix declared, looking immensely relieved. "Kraden was awful, he kept telling us what to do, like 'put that in that bin', and 'the bin is over there' even though there were about a dozen bins all over the cottage."

"Don't remind me," Isaac shuddered. "Well, I'm going to go to the plaza, I might as well spread the word Kraden needs a new roof or something in case he decides we really can give him a new roof or something."

"Good idea," said Felix thoughtfully. He noticed Jenna marching around and screaming while wearing a green beret and blinked. "I, on the other hand, shall ask my sister why she is currently running around and yelling with a hat on her head."

"Good idea," Isaac nodded, smiling, and then he rushed off to the plaza as Felix nervously approached Jenna, being very careful not to suddenly provoke her just in case.

"Kraden needs a new roof!" Isaac announced out loud to everybody in the plaza. He was a little disheartened to see that nobody had suddenly rushed off to go and get a roof, but then again where would they get one from? Isaac noticed Ivan and Sheba standing behind a building and whispering, but he had no time to go and ask why they were standing behind a building and whispering.

"Visitor!" A Valean screamed and yelled frantically, jumping up and down by the gate as if he had ants in his pants or something. "It is a visitor!"

"Right..." Isaac sweated heavily and approached the gate, wondering why a visitor was making the poor Valean act as if it was the coming of the Apocalypse or something. But then again, some Valeans did tend to be nervous about visitors after all that had happened in the past. He swung open the gate and then he was shocked.

"Hi, Isaac!" exclaimed the purple-haired girl as she stepped into the village, her green eyes sparkling with happiness. "It's great to see you again!"

"Feizhi," Isaac forced himself to smile. It wasn't that he was disappointed or anything, but she was the last person he would have expected to see. And why was she looking at him like that?

Mia was just walking around Vale, doing nothing in particular since it was nice just looking at the flowers and everything. Actually, there wasn't much to do in Vale, but it was such a nice place she wouldn't mind living here forever with Isaac.

'If he ever realises I love him,' Mia thought glumly. 'And with any luck he'll feel the same way about me.'

"Hi, Mia," Somebody spoke from behind her and Mia turned to see the last person that she would have ever wanted to see on Weyard. She would rather have seen Kraden about to start reading out loud from a very thick book, but she just wasn't that lucky.

"Alex," said Mia coldly, glaring at him.

***Chapter 7*: Chapter 7**

Love Bites

"What do you want, Alex?" Mia demanded, unable to believe that this long-haired guy who resembled a girl far too much was actually standing within a fifty-mile perimeter of her, let alone a metre away. A metre was too close for Mia, heck, even if he had dropped down Gaia Falls he would be too close for comfort.

"Mia, I have found you again," Alex's eyes shone and he clasped his fists together, smiling goofily at the female Mercury Adept. "I am so glad... for to be without you for a second is like a knife in my heart. You are the reason I am still alive, for upon Mt. Aleph, I struggled to survive... thinking of you."

"... Oh..." Mia blanched, taking a step backwards. She almost took another one backwards but realised she was at the top of the plaza steps, and Alex was taking another step closer which she simply could not bear. "Sick him, Serac!" The named Mercury Djinni promptly encased Alex in a cone of ice and he whimpered painfully.

"Do not break my heart, Mia!" Alex wailed, now completely sodding wet. "I love you more than anything in the world, and you could kill me as often as you liked, but I would still love you so much! Marry me, Mia!"

"Shut up," Mia growled angrily, turning around and staring directly at Isaac and Feizhi. She could not bear to look at the, in her opinion disgusting, man known as Alex for a second longer. "Shut up and leave me alone."

"Oh, Isaac," Feizhi simpered, smiling dopily up at the stricken Venus Adept. "I knew that our love was meant to be... don't you feel the same?"

"L-LOVE?" exclaimed Isaac in a strangled voice. "What are you talk-mmmmmmmf!" He flailed desperately as Feizhi promptly embraced him. Isaac struggled, thinking he could not have struggled more valiantly had the Fusion Dragon been choking him to death in a hug- although that was too scary to even imagine, and managed to push her away. "What were you doing?" Isaac asked, a hint of annoyance in his voice, and he turned his back to Feizhi.

What he saw next made his blood run cold. There was Mia standing at the top of the plaza steps, staring down at him with a stricken expression. Alex was behind her too... what was Alex doing there? Isaac was dismayed... had Mia seen Feizhi kiss him? Would she realise it had been Feizhi behind it and Isaac would not reciprocate her feelings? What if...

"Never mind," Mia sighed and turned around to look at Alex who seemed to have recovered from his recent attack by Serac. "What are you doing here, Alex?" She asked, crossing her arms and giving him a defiant glare, trying to mask the unhappiness that she was feeling... she couldn't believe she had seen someone else... kissing... HER Isaac... it was not possible... how could she?

"Why do you look so confused?" Feizhi asked, staring at the stunned and confused Isaac who had turned back to face her. "Didn't... the old man say that he would tell you how I felt? And didn't they give you the ring? There was a young man there too, who I thought looked a bit like you..."

"A bit like me?" The clockworks in Isaac's brain were slowly turning. "Some guy who travels with an old man and looks

like me? The only old man I can think of is Kraden... and what exactly did this 'young man' look like?" He could not recall having gotten a ring, but he decided to leave that out in case she was hurt.

"Yes," Feizhi nodded eagerly. "I thought it was you... he had long brown hair, and a green cape... and warm, trusting brown eyes... like a puppy! I do like puppies with those nice brown eyes..."

"Felix?" Isaac wailed in a disbelieving voice. "Felix? You're kidding? I'm not like Felix, we don't look alike, how could you mistake Felix for me?" Now Isaac was beginning to feel utterly humiliated to think that he could resemble that sulky Venus Adept who had a penchant for masks... or at least used to.

"Oh, well, the blindness of love must have been in my eyes," Feizhi murmured dreamily, a faraway look coming into her eyes. Then she thought of something. "Isaac... do... you... have someone else?"

"Well..." Isaac considered the possibilities. If he said yes, Feizhi might turn psychotic and kidnap his 'girlfriend' if she was even capable. If he said no however, Feizhi might turn psychotic and kidnap him. Either way Feizhi might turn psychotic. Therefore he would have to be evasive, he would have to skirt around the topic and try to direct her to another topic which did not turn her into a psychotic being hellbent on claiming him for her own. Or maybe he was just being too paranoid. But when your mother tries to feed you poisonous pancakes (or at least Isaac suspected they could be) how can you avoid being paranoid? "Do you like Hsu?"

"The kazoo?" Feizhi stared blankly at Isaac, her nose wrinkling. "What does the kazoo have to do with whether

you have a girlfriend or not? Who is this girlfriend?"

"Who said it was a girlfriend?" Isaac shot back casually. Feizhi's eyes widened and she took a step back, staring horrified at Isaac. Isaac stared back, not understanding why Feizhi was staring at him in that manner. 'Oh no, she isn't turning psychotic is she? I want my mommy!'

"Y-you mean... you... have... a BOYFRIEND?" Feizhi cried out in dismay. Isaac's reaction took all of three seconds. In the first second, he gaped at her like a goldfish stuck to the side of a fishbowl, then in the second second he started to shake all over, incoherent noises coming out of his mouth, then in the third second he was on the ground screaming and twitching, as well as foaming at the mouth. "Oh, no, Isaac! You're not choking are you?"

"What am I doing here?" Alex echoed Mia's question, thoughtfully tugging on a strand of his long hair. He had spend half an hour that morning grooming it. In fact, while Isaac and Felix had been walking to Kraden's cottage, he had been adding the last touches of hairgel. "The answer to the question is quite simple, my dear, beloved Mia..." He foolishly did not notice the growl coming out of her mouth. "My love for you guided me here, you are like a beacon shining out to me wherever you are, a light shining in the darkness."

"SPEAKING of beacons," said Mia icily. "So the lightning of the lighthouse beacons may have saved the world, but I cannot forget how you betrayed the Mercury Clan and you tried to rule the world. So how about you just slither back to the sepulchral bat cave from whence you came?"

"But, Mia," Alex protested desperately. "I did it for you, in the hope that as I ruled the world, you might see me in a better

light and might even be my consort, and we could rule the world together, you and me. I risked my life for you, is that not enough to show you how I feel about you?"

"Alex," Mia gritted her teeth and wondered if she could do something about this pesky Mercury Adept standing in front of her. A lightbulb flashed on above her head. "Thank you very much, I appreciate all that you have done for me, and I understand that you are truly psychopathically obsessed with me, which is very nice of you."

"You do?" Alex gazed in rapture at her, and his eyes sparkled. "That is truly a joy, Mia, I am very happy to see you finally understand my feelings. I am happier than I have ever been before, and it is made better by the fact that you are here, telling me that you are happy for what I have done."

'Does he have to talk so much?' Mia wondered, chewing on her bottom lip. 'Sometimes I think that Alex is worse than Kraden... definitely worse than Kraden. That old man couldn't possibly rule the world... he would have given up just trying to scale the first foothill of Mt. Aleph!'

"Alex," Mia spoke in a clipped tone. Alex jumped at the mention of his name, as if a Jupiter Adept had just stuck a pin into his rear. But of course the Jupiter Adepts were currently down in the plaza, discussing goodness knows what. "Come with me, it is time I finally demonstrate my feelings for you."

"Yes, Mia," Alex simpered. Mia almost threw up, but she did not, and felt heartily disappointed for she would have loved to have thrown up at Alex... especially on his hair. His hair was vile, it reflected the sun and it shone like a second Mercury Lighthouse beacon in her opinion.

Mia led Alex all the way up to the river that ran through Vale and came to a stop just south of the first bridge, directly next to the waterfall at the end of the river. Alex looked around expectantly, as if he was expecting something to happen. Mia smirked evilly, but of course Alex did not see her evil smirk.

"Here is perfect," Mia turned to Alex, a big, broad, fake smile plastered on her face. "I think that we should do it here."

"Here?" Alex gasped out, his eyes turning as big as saucers. "But, my darling-" Mia gagged again but of course Alex did not notice that, he was too busy talking as he always was. If Vale had turned into a crater in that very moment, he might still have gone on talking. "Do you not think it is a little bit public?"

"It will be all right," Mia assured him in a soothing tone. "Nobody will see us..." 'And if they saw me do it, they might build a shrine to me and worship me,' Mia added privately. "Alex, close your eyes." Alex immediately did so, and she sensed that he was feeling very excited, presumably about the prospect of something very different, Mia thought grimly. "Alex, I have longed to tell you this for a long time, and I am so happy we are finally here together so that I can show you..."

"You..." Mia took a deep breath, smiling evilly and pausing to check that Alex was just the right distance away from the river. Good. "Are..." Mia took a step closer to the eagerly waiting Alex, his eyes still closed of course. "A..." Mia flung out her hands and shoved him so hard, he landed in the river with a resounding splash. "SCUMBAG!" Alex screamed and flailed, but Mia was quicker and summoned a wave of water to carry him down the waterfall.

"Miiiiiaaaaaaaa!!!" Alex screamed as he plummeted down the waterfall towards the mountains to wherever the Mt. Aleph boulder had gone. "I'll be back for yoooooooouuuuuu!!!" And then he was gone, and Mia breathed an audible sigh of relief.

'That's one problem solved,' Mia smiled in satisfaction, turning and starting her way back to the plaza. 'Now what about Isaac and Feizhi? I feel I've just... got to ask what's going on... I.... don't want him with her... I want him... with... me...'

"F-Fei...zhi...." Isaac had finally managed to compose himself. He was pale as a ghost, but he did not really care about that right now. He was still too stunned at somebody assuming he had a boyfriend. "I... no, you got it wrong... I just meant that I might not have a girlfriend. I'm not homosexual, I assure you..."

"Do you... love somebody else then?" Feizhi ventured nervously. Isaac was taken aback at the question, but he knew that he would have to answer her, he was still scared of her turning psychotic on him, especially since he did not really know Feizhi all that well.

"I... yes, I do," Isaac finally admitted, vigorously nodding his head. "I'm sorry but I've already got my eye on somebody else. I just don't know yet if she's going to reciprocate my feelings..." 'And you probably messed it up by kissing me in front of her,' Isaac mentally added with a hint of sadness in his expression.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Feizhi went scarlet, staring down at her boots. "I didn't realise... I thought that the old man would give you the ring... or... Felix, was it? I thought you'd know how I felt about you, they said they would tell you... I'm so embarrassed! Please, can you accept my apology?"

"Okay," Isaac said numbly, deciding to have a talk to Kraden. His blood ran cold as he realised he actually wanted to talk to Kraden, and he wondered if he was actually going insane? "I accept it. So, what are you going to do now? Go back to Xian?"

"I think I'll stay at the inn," Feizhi indicated the Vale inn. "For tonight, I suppose."

"It's okay, you don't have to go straight away," Isaac assured her. "Well, I've got things to do, so... later." Rather than wait for a response from Feizhi, he turned and fled up the plaza steps, almost colliding with a certain blue-haired female Mercury Adept. "M-Mia!"

"Hi, Isaac," Mia was not going to beat around the bush, she was going to come straight out with her question. "What was going on down there? You know, when Feizhi kissed you, right? You two... haven't got something going on have you?" She knew it was a foolish question, considering that Isaac and Feizhi had only met like three times, and Mia had been there at both times, and to tell the truth, Isaac had not spoken a word on any one of those occasions.

"No!" Isaac wailed in a voice that was so loud that even Mia was taken aback. She noticed the flush that crept along his nose and cheeks, and took this as a positive sign although... it was still too early. "It's not like that, Mia... she just had a crush on me and she kissed me out there with no warning. In fact, she apparently met Felix and company on their journey, and Kraden pretty much promised to tell me how she felt about me and to give me a ring, which I frankly do not have."

"Ohhh!" Mia felt a huge surge of relief flooding through her. "That is such a relief! I'm so glad that there's nothing going

on between you and Feizhi..." She noticed a suspicious, hopeful look creeping into Isaac's eyes and hurriedly changed the topic around. "I think you'd be better off with a girl you know," said Mia abruptly, turning and heading off back in the opposite direction, her face flaring red.

'A girl I know...' Isaac watched Mia's retreating back and his mouth spread into a secretive smile. 'You're just about there, Mia... oh, Mia... when are you going to actually tell me your feelings? Well... no time to waste, I had better go and see Kraden about a certain ring... and a certain girl... even if he tries to talk me to death. Maybe I'll just stuff a handkerchief in his mouth or something.' Whistling, Isaac headed off towards Kraden's cottage.

"Jenna?" Felix ventured nervously, watching the raging pyromaniac wearing a green hat on her head shouting out random words, some of which were dangerously close to rude words. "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" Jenna turned her fiery gaze to him and even Felix flinched when faced with his sister's immense rage. "What's wrong? What do you THINK is wrong, Felix?"

"Well," Felix paused, considering what was different about Jenna today. "It is difficult to say, but it might be something to do with the fact that you are wearing a hat, when I have never seen you wearing a hat in your whole life. But perhaps you are just developing a new fashion sense?"

"Ugh," Jenna shook her head and grabbed his arm, forcefully pulling him into a shelter of trees. She then pulled off her hat and shook her hair down to her shoulders. "THIS is what is wrong. Look at my hair!"

"Whoah..." Felix stared at her newly auburn hair. "Jenna! Who said you could dye your hair? Besides, that colour is a

bit... weird..." 'And it reminds me of your doofus boyfriend,' He added sourly, although he restricted it to his thoughts, since he did not really want to make Jenna any worse.

"I didn't dye it!" Jenna was beginning to get very fed up of people accusing her of dying her hair. "I know who dyed it, it was Sheba! Sheba dyed my hair... I'm going to make that Jupiter Adept pay for this! This is a heinous crime! She should be arrested for... cruelty to hair!"

"You're positive that Sheba did it?" Felix asked cautiously. He had noticed Gareth, Jenna, Ivan and Sheba acting very strange, and he was beginning to suspect that something was about to happen. "But why would she do it?"

"I know she did it," responded Jenna stonily. "We.... me, Gareth, Ivan and Sheba, we are... plotting against each other. And anyway, why else would she have been the first up and ran out of the house just as I was looking in the mirror? And why else is she hiding from me?"

"Well..." Felix shook his head, not knowing what to say about his sister's dire situation or what to make of the whole thing. "All I can say is that your hair colour is not really something to dye for-"

"Felix," Jenna interrupted. "Make another joke and you're going to find yourself in hot water, got that?"

"Er, sure," Felix nervously took a step backwards in case she tried to do it anyway. "Anyway, you should wash your hair. That hat is not very... becoming. Did you dig it up or something?"

"Actually," Jenna was horrified at the thought she might wear something she dug up, in fact she didn't like to dig. Hence Felix had the Scoop Gem, and nobody else did.

Neither Jenna or Sheba had particularly liked the idea of digging, and besides it was a Venus thing. "It was a present from Grandmother a few years ago."

"Oh..." Felix mentally hit himself. Of course it was from their grandmother, from what Felix was able to remember, she had been particularly good at giving him and Jenna particularly bad clothing. He remembered the time he had received a yellow jumper. Fortunately, that day, Garet had injured his arm on some barbed wire and Felix gave him the jumper to bind up his wound. The bloodstained yellow jumper had then been discarded of. "But then who says Grandmother never dug anything up?"

"Felix..." Jenna shook her head and put her hair back up, stuffing it into the detested beret. "You wouldn't understand why Grandmother would not dig, so never mind."

For some reason, Felix felt a little insulted. Then a thought occurred to him, and he was amazed that the thought had not occurred to him until now, but at least it had.

"Hey," Felix said suddenly. "How did you know that I was saying 'dye' and not 'die' just then? Don't they sound the same?"

"Wha..." Jenna stared open mouthed at him, then she clamped a hand on his forehead. "I think you're a bit feverish. Must have caught something at Kraden's cottage, you should go and rest-"

"But I'm not-" Felix protested. Too late, Jenna was dragging him back to their house. Their parents were somewhat surprised to learn that Felix was going to bed and Jenna was having a shower this late in the day, but they said nothing of it.

While Felix tossed in and turned in his bed and Jenna scrubbed away at her hair, Isaac headed towards certain doom at Kraden's cottage. Gareth finished his chores and started cheering for a few moments until he realised that he still had five days left. Ivan and Sheba continued to talk about mysterious things down in the plaza, and Picard... well, Picard was currently fending off a gaggle of Valean girls. Kay not included, naturally. For something was terribly wrong with Gareth's big sister. And Mia continued to walk around Vale, being very bored.

***Chapter 8*: Chapter 8**

Love Bites

"For the last time, I cannot tell you how old I am," Picard was considering making a run for it, but considering he was surrounded by fangirls, it was somewhat difficult. "It is a sacred subject and I have sworn never to breach my vow of secrecy, so please be gone. OW! Who pinched my-"

"How do you get such amazing pecs?" A blonde girl asked, squeezing Picard's muscles. "I wish my boyfriend could have such impressive muscles like yours, then I wouldn't have to tell him to work out all the time. He's getting a little bit on the tubby side actually."

"Do you dye your hair?" A mousy, short girl asked, peering owlishly at Picard and blinking her big brown eyes. They reminded him of Felix however and he involuntarily shuddered. "My boyfriend doesn't do that."

"Wait, wait!" Picard held up his hands and stemmed the flow of questions. "You have boyfriends?" The girls looked at each other in consternation, then turned solemn gazes towards him and he was dismayed to see most of them briskly nodding their heads. "Oh no... Where are they?" He began to feel panicky as he saw a group of boys or men standing nearby. The girls who had nodded pointed towards the men. Picard gulped as they started walking towards him. "H-Help!"

"Hey! Over here!" A girl's voice sounded nearby and all the guys turned. Mia stood nearby, smiling devilishly. "Leave Picard alone!" The guys started advancing towards her, and of course the fangirls guessed what was happening. They

immediately rushed up and slapped their boyfriends... well, the ones with boyfriends anyway, leaving not very many girls behind at all. Mia immediately started running for dear life before the girls could go after her too.

"I'm afraid I must go now," Picard swept a low bow to the remaining girls who screamed and fainted down to the ground, before taking off in a different direction from Mia. He almost accidentally crashed into a fierce pyromaniac. Unfortunately the wrong female pyromaniac.... if he had been lucky, it would have been Jenna, Jenna was not as likely to kill him than Garet's sister was. "Um..."

"Look where you're going, you moron!" Kay yelled, her eyes flaring with rage. "Are you so dense that you can't even see where you're going? If you crash into me again then trust me, you'll be made to regret it." Her mouth curved into an evil smile.

"You're obviously not like that gaggle of girls who tried to kidnap me earlier," Picard responded smoothly. "They all surrounded me and talked too much, even though half of them had boyfriends. And their boyfriends nearly beat me up. Come to think of it, Jenna's not like them either. You and Jenna are officially my two favourite Valean girls."

"You are so weird," Kay shook her head and stalked off past Picard. Picard stared at her back dumbly.

"Talk about weird," Picard murmured under his breath so that she would not hear. "No wonder Felix thought I was crackers. She's worse than even Jenna." 'Not to mention she's being cruel and apparently manipulating Garet,' Picard thought. Jenna had been talking about it a fair bit at the table after all.

"Kraden!" Isaac hollered, bursting into the cottage as he flung the door wide open, his scarf flapping in the breeze as he tried to look all dramatic while the door clumsily banged against the opposing wall. "You, me, talk now!"

"You want to talk to me, Isaac?" Kraden looked joyfully at him from where he was standing in the middle of the room. The elderly scholar looked at the large book he was holding then dropped it to the floor where it landed in a flurry of dust. "Come in, come in, this is truly a joy, you want to talk to me!"

'I don't want to talk to you, not really,' Isaac thought mournfully as he stepped further into the cottage. When he was a short distance away from Kraden but nonetheless a safe distance that would not let Kraden grab him and dip him in the pot to see what happened when you dipped Venus Adepts in a pot or something. Isaac cleared his throat. "Er-hem... now..."

"Er-hem!" Kraden echoed delightfully. "Er-hem is a wonderful sound, it signifies the motion of you clearing your throat with what's a sound between a cough and a swallow, so that you can talk without breaking off to have to-"

"Kraden, please," Isaac interrupted hastily. "I am afraid that I have to talk to you. Something very serious has come up and I urgently need to talk about it with you right now."

"Really?" Kraden grinned. "Did you discover the true secret of Alchemy? Wait, we learnt that stuff on Mars Lighthouse, did we not? Did you learn how to get a new Stone of Sages or something? Quickly, tell me!"

"Well, unless Mia grossly murdered him, it seems that Alex is alive but that's not what I want to talk to you about," Isaac waved his hand dismissively. "Do you remember meeting a

girl named Feizhi in a certain place? Champa ring any bells?"

"Feizhi?" Kraden tilted his head, deep in thought. Isaac crossed his arms and waited patiently, stonily staring at Kraden. Time passed and passed as the sage continued to think, his eyes glazing over. Isaac frowned and tentatively stepped forwards, reaching out towards Kraden with a trembling finger.

Isaac poked Kraden in the side and he fell over to the floor with a soft thud.

"Aah!" Isaac yelped in shock and jumped back, shaking all over as he stared at the old man lying prone on the floor. "Kraden! Are you okay?" 'The old coot can't die yet!' He thought in alarm. 'Maybe I should get Mia, or cast Revive or...'

"Isaac, honestly!" Kraden growled into the floor, scrambling to his feet. "I had just remembered who Feizhi was when you poked me like that and sent me crashing to the floor! When you are old as I am and have a lot of knowledge in your soul, remembering simple things such as people and their names and faces takes a lengthy amount of thinking!"

"Sorry," Isaac chuckled nervously, a sweatdrop rolling down his head. He seemed to be having very bad luck lately. First he had blown Kraden's cottage up and then knocked him over, which was clearly not very good. In fact, Isaac was surprised Kraden wasn't beginning to have a personal vendetta against him. "Do you remember Feizhi well? Anything? Perhaps a PROMISE?"

"Hang on, Isaac," Kraden flapped his hands impatiently, signalling for Isaac to shut up. "If I remember correctly, Feizhi was some odd girl who mistook Felix for you even

though you two share so little resemblance at all. You, Isaac, have short blond spiky hair and blue eyes while Felix has long brown hair in a ponytail with brown eyes. Okay, so she saw us from the back, but you two still do not look alike from the back, and your outfits-

"Kraden, please!" Isaac interrupted wearily. "I get the picture. Now could you please get to the point?"

"Shut up, Isaac, you should learn to be polite and not be so rude to your elders, especially after you blew up my cottage, made me roofless and pushed me over!" Kraden commanded. "Now, this girl Feizhi, she clearly liked you and she had even made you a golden ring. I naturally promised, since Felix was lost for words by the shock of being mistook for Isaac and it didn't help that Jenna was laughing like a hyena the whole time and Sheba was coughing loudly and Picard was constantly asking who Isaac really was..."

"Mm-hmm," Isaac nodded wearily, his eyes also beginning to glaze over. 'No! Must not even think of losing consciousness, must let the old man keep talking! ... I want Mom...'

"I promised to give you the Golden Ring and tell you how Feizhi felt, or Felix could do it for you, or even Jenna or Sheba or Picard since they were there too," Kraden said finally. "Oh, didn't they tell you?"

"Nobody told me at all," said Isaac dangerously. "Why wasn't I given this... ring?"

"But it was so useful, so beautiful, so lovely..." Kraden sighed, and he noticed Isaac's dumbfounded look. "No, really, it was very beautifully made, Feizhi is very talented. I am not sure who took it, it could have been any one of them for all I know, and they probably equipped it. At least you know now... hang on, how did you find out?"

"Feizhi told me," Isaac smirked, crossing his arms again and trying to look imperious. "She turned up in Vale and tried to plant a gigantic smacker on me! Actually, she succeeded with it... right in front of MIA! And then she just lets it out, telling me about your promise to tell me how she felt and to give me the ring!"

"Mia?" Kraden immediately latched into Isaac's usage of the female Mercury Adept's name. "It concerns you that Feizhi kissed you in front of Mia? Does this mean that you are thinking of having a relationship with Mia or you're in one that I was not aware of?"

"Tell Mia and you're in big trouble," Isaac said warningly. "I'm going to tell her when the time is right. Now I'm off." He hurriedly turned and ran out of the cottage, mentally screaming at the old man's ability to pick up on such things.

"Kids," Kraden shook his head. "They grow up so fast."

It was well into the afternoon when Jenna walked out of her house, her gloriously auburn-free hair cascading down her shoulders. Felix was surprisingly enough still asleep but she didn't care, however she was hoping very much that Gareth was out of his house. After all, they had to get their revenge on Ivan and Sheba.

"Jenna!" Gareth hollered, charging down the steps towards her, a big goofy grin on his face. "Over here!"

"Garet-kun!" Jenna squealed, rushing into his arms. They spent the next few minutes fervently kissing as if they had not seen each other for a whole week, then at last they parted, gasping for breath.

"Your hair's a nice colour now," Gareth beamed.

"It's the same colour as it's always been..." Jenna raised an eyebrow.

"Exactly!" Gareth responded.

"Right..." Jenna blinked and shook her head, knowing fully well how eccentric her boyfriend was capable of being.

"Well, how are you going to get your own back on Ivan? I think I know what I'm going to do to Sheba..." Her smile spread into a wicked grin, and it was reflected on Gareth's face too.

Meanwhile, in the plaza, Ivan and Sheba both shuddered.

"Whoah, that was a weird feeling," Sheba felt the tingle fade from her spine and stared oddly at Ivan. "Did you feel that too?"

"Yeah," Ivan's eyes narrowed. "I bet a certain duo are thinking of us. Hey, why have we been standing in the plaza the whole time?" Sheba merely looked at him, lost for words, her mouth hanging open. "You look like a fish," Ivan grinned. Sheba's face transformed into a scowl and she lightly punched him in the shoulder.

"Help me!" Felix screamed as the spaghetti noodles tightened around him, binding him to the candy cane that was stuck in the ground. The ground was odd, it looked more like chocolate. He was sure it was because it was the right shade of brown. "Let me go now!"

"Bwahahahahaha..."

"Oh, very funny," Felix stopped screaming as he saw a pink rabbit bouncing up and blinking its big blue eyes at him. "What the heck? Rabbits aren't pink."

"That's what you think," The rabbit said, popping on a pair of glasses and pointing a finger at him. "I am here to lecture you on the evils of noodle eating."

"I'm definitely dreaming," Felix said decisively. The rabbit glared at him and then started to sprout green hair. "This is going from scary to insane... green hair? Hang on..." It reminded him of a certain old man right after his cottage had been blown up. "NO! IT'S KRADEN!"

"That's right!" The pink rabbit metamorphosed into Kraden. "I am punishing you for letting Isaac blow up my cottage!"

Music started to stream through the air and some mice wearing crowns walked forwards, playing flutes. Kraden disappeared in a puff of grey smoke and the crowned mice surrounded Felix, continuing to play the flutes.

"Mice Kings," Felix struggled against the noodles. "Save me from the Mice Kings!"

"Prepare to experience your worst nightmares..."

Felix blinked as the Mice Kings disappeared and he saw Gareth and Jenna. Gareth was holding a ring and Jenna was staring at it.

"Jenna, will you marry me?" asked Gareth.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" Jenna squealed and threw her arms around Gareth's neck. "YES!"

"Noooooooo!" Felix screamed. The scene changed again and now Alex was standing in front of him. "Oh, no... and I thought the last one was bad," He said sarcastically, glaring at the Alex-nightmare standing there.

"I shall rule the world..." Alex tittered, his voice sounding unnaturally high. "And you shall be my slave!" Felix blinked in confusion, stared at Alex's chest and started screaming again, his screams reaching to a much higher pitch, especially as Alex started walking towards him, a grin on his face.

"Wake up," Picard spoke from behind him. Felix managed to twist his head and saw the Lemurian. "Wake up. Wake up. Wake up."

"SHUT UP!" Felix howled, sitting up in his bed. His head connected with Picard's and he yelped at the pain while Picard fell to the floor in a faint. "Oops..." Felix chuckled nervously and rubbed the forming bruise on his forehead. "That Lemurian sure has a hard head. Or is it me with the hard head? I have no clue. It was just a dream... just a dream... thank goodness..."

The rest of the day fortunately managed to pass without any further incidents. It was not until nighttime that the Adept War took a further step. Gareth and Jenna had ensured that Ivan and Sheba would not know what their revenge was until bedtime, and it was going pretty well. The two Mars Adepts had made sure they got to bed earlier, they really didn't want to be awake for the Jupiter Adepts' wrath. Ivan and Sheba had avoided their wrath, so why shouldn't they?

Ivan scampered across the hallway, his teeth freshly brushed and he closed the door behind him as he entered his room. The Jupiter Adept looked around cautiously just in case, he couldn't be too careful when being a guest in Gareth's house after all. Deciding there were no traps on the floor or ceiling, Ivan was satisfied and walked over to the bed, sitting on it. He stretched his arms and yawned widely, exhaling deeply

with a soft snuffly sound. Isaac and Gareth had made fun of him for that in the past but he simply did not care.

He rubbed his tired eyes and slipped off the bed onto the floor, his bare feet not making a sound on the carpet. Ivan slowly drew back the duvet and he blinked, for there was something on the mattress, something which had not been there before. Ivan took a sharp breath and reached out towards it, the strange little object which should not have been there. He had a pretty good guess what it was, but he just had to make sure.

Ivan unfolded the slip of paper, sitting back down on the bed, and smoothed the creases where it had been folded. His mouth lifted up at the corners into a wide, amused smile as he saw what was on the paper, the contents clearly readable in the moonlight that shone on the paper. It quite simply said 'U SMEL OF POO' and there was a little stick figure in the corner with spiky hair just like Gareth's, frowning and sticking his tongue out. Ivan had to put his hand over his mouth to quell the gales of laughter that threatened to burst forth, he couldn't believe how childishly simple Gareth's revenge had been, but he supposed it was better than a noogie or something. Gareth had done worse to him in the past anyway. Shaking with silent laughter, Ivan tossed the note onto his nightstand and slipped into bed, pulling the duvet up to his shoulders and closing his eyes shut.

Sheba glanced suspiciously at the lump that was the apparently sleeping Jenna in her bed, as she walked towards her own bed. Sheba had a nervous feeling that Jenna had already done something to do with getting her own back, but whatever it was, it clearly hadn't happened yet. Sheba didn't think that Jenna had poisoned her food or anything like that, they weren't really trying to hurt each other or worse, they just wanted to annoy each other.

Gulping, Sheba drew back her duvet and screeched loudly. Unlike Ivan, she had not received a note from Jenna. Instead it was a doll lying in her bed. The eyes had been torn out, leaving small sockets, and its face was covered in dark red lipstick which looked surprisingly like blood, especially in the light shining through the window. There was a lipstick message on the torso as well, it basically said 'HA HA HA SUCKER'. Sheba gasped and stepped back, waiting until her breath evened out before angrily grabbing the doll and flinging it into the bin with a loud clang. She ignored Jenna's quiet cackling as she slipped into bed and tried to go to sleep, still a bit shellshocked since the doll had looked quite scary on first sight.

***Chapter 9*: Chapter 9**

Love Bites

Mia hummed a tune as she walked towards the toilet, needing to answer a call of nature. The door was locked and she didn't have to worry about anybody coming in. Neither was she worried about the author writing about her going to the toilet. She reached out and lifted the lid, getting the shock of her life as a head popped up out of the toilet.

"Mia!" Alex cried, unaware of how strange it was to be right in the toilet. "I came all the way for you, now will you toi-let me profess my devotion for you and finally accept me as the one you truly love? I will not accept no for an answer!"

"AUGH!" Mia was truly enraged now, she had heard Alex make a bad pun and it was even worse because it was ALEX right there... "You pervert, what do you doing in the toilet?" She angrily pulled the flush and Alex began to get pulled down.

"Nooooooooooooooooo!" Alex wailed as he disappeared down the toilet out of sight. "Miiiiiiiiaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!"

"Jerk," Mia did her business then went to the sink to wash her hands. She put the plughole in the sink and turned the tap on. Mia received yet another shock as Alex came through the tap, shrunken down, and splashed into the water.

"Mia..." Alex simpered, splashing around in the water and gazing up at her. "Please tell me you never get that sinking feeling when you see me, please tell me you feel the same way about me as I you! I love you, I will conquer all odds!"

"SHUT UP!" Mia yelled, plunging her hand into the sink and wrenching out the plughole, smiling as Alex was washed down it along with the water.

"Noooooooooooooooo!" Alex screamed again, disappearing through the plughole and going down into the drain. "I love yoooooooouuuu!!!"

Mia sighed in relief, washed her hands and turned around to see... Alex.

She screamed and sat up in bed, sighing in relief and wiping her forehead, relieved that it had just been a scary dream.

"Mia?" Isaac called from his bedroom. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing!" Mia yelled back. "Just a bad dream!" She slumped back down onto the bed, burying her face in the pillow and trying to forget the horrible dream about Alex popping up, it was more than she could bear just seeing him.

It was morning and Felix was walking. He felt a little grumpy due to having woken up early and being unable to sleep, and just taking a walk in the cold fresh air made him want to go back to bed, but he might as well just enjoy it. Vale was nice and quiet, and those annoying fangirls running around screaming for Picard would be fast asleep in bed if they had any sense at all. Except, Felix mused with a devious smile, they probably didn't have much sense if they went for the Lemurian.

Little did he know that a proud member of the OBHL was currently writing his name on a list, frowning and looking dangerously decisive after Felix's little thought. As it was, Felix was barely conscious of anything at the moment in his sleepy daze. If he was conscious of anything, he would know

he was still in his pyjamas. Felix idly whistled a little tune as he walked towards the plaza, not knowing why he was going that way, but for some reason everybody liked to go to the plaza.

"Hey, cute pyjamas, Felix!" An insane person who was awake shouted through their window, a goofy grin on their face. "You should wear them more often!"

"You're up?" Felix mumbled sleepily. "Crazy, insane person being up at this time of the morning."

"Excuse me, you're up too!" The angry person slammed the window and Felix had the horrible feeling that he was being added to somebody's list, accompanied by the even worse feeling that it was not the first time that morning. Gulping, Felix considered the next plan of action that he should take and he did, turning and running back home, screaming. He did not get very far before a cranky squirrel in a tree flung an apple at him and it smacked his head neatly. Neatly enough to make him fall over.

"This is turning out to be a bad day," Felix whined, getting to his feet and rubbing his bruised head "I don't think that anything could possibly make this day worse. I get added to lists and a squirrel hits me with an apple..." His tirade continued as he walked into his house, listing all the bad things that had happened to him in his life as he crawled into his bed. He continued until Picard awoke and told Felix to shut up, so he didn't have much choice in the matter but to shut up.

Later on, Vale was now awake and it was as loud as it tended to be. Insane fangirls ran through the village shrieking for Lemurians and Felix shot death glares at them as he passed, trying to survive the swarms and get through alive. They

were a genuine health hazard, Felix believed, and he wouldn't admit it, but he did feel a little bit unhappy that he didn't have his own fangirls. He felt that he should, he had the good looks and better clothes than Picard and he was younger too, possibly by about a hundred years. He had led a group to saving the world, and he had survived about a million dangerous situations.

'It's not fair, Picard gets all the popularity,' Felix sulked towards the plaza, being drawn to it by its unbeatable pull that drew every Valean or visitor to it, running over the lists of reasons why he was better than Picard in his mind and deciding that he definitely was. Felix stood at the top of the plaza steps and looked around the plaza, scouting it for visitors, just in case. Visitors could be predictable. Felix could even remember when he had been a visitor... not that he planned to be again. The Venus Adept saw a very familiar sight and froze to the spot, trying to deny who it was, but unable to. 'Oh no...'

'This is so boring,' Feizhi was unhappy as she wandered around the plaza, surrounded by rabid fangirls screaming about a Picard. She had expected Vale to be better than this, but now she was wishing she was back home in Xian. At least she could play at Kung Fu and beat up Hsu and make him cry. He nearly always cried, especially when Feizhi kicked him very hard in certain places. 'Maybe I should go back...' She looked up and her mouth dropped open.

'Oh no, she's seen me!' Felix was now breaking into a cold sweat. He had a better memory than Kraden, he remembered all too well how she had given them a Golden Ring, but Sheba had liked it so much, they didn't have the heart to give it to Isaac despite promising her... and if she'd already seen Isaac and she knew... he was in trouble. 'What

do I do?' Felix frantically looked around for a quick escape route.

"Remember me?" asked Feizhi, standing at the bottom of the steps and giving him a penetrating stare that chilled Felix to the bone. "I think I'd be quite disappointed if you didn't, there aren't that many girls with purple hair." She smiled sarcastically.

"F-Fei...zhi..." Felix nodded slowly, his eyes widening. "Y-yeah, we saw you in Champa... but why are you here in Vale? Where do you live anyway?"

"I live in Xian," Feizhi responded. Felix facefaulted and she snorted. "I didn't come here all the way by myself. I went to Champa alone because it isn't that far, but I did have escorts with me to help me through the Lamakan Desert." Now she seemed to be grinning evilly.

"And what happened to your escorts?" Felix asked, hoping Feizhi really wasn't a psycho. Perhaps she was and that led to stalking Isaac, but then again she didn't seem to be the type, but appearances can be defective. 'Help!'

"Oh, I gave them the slip back in Vault yesterday," Feizhi chuckled. "They wanted to stay the night because they were tired, but I wanted to see Isaac again so I just disappeared and got here. It wasn't that far. They should be here soon anyway... oh, and do you know what I can do to monsters that decide to ambush me when I'm out walking?" By now she was walking up the plaza steps towards Felix.

"Er.... o...k..." Felix choked out, taking a hesitant step back. Feizhi shot forwards in a whirl of arms and legs and in an instant, Felix was on his back and Feizhi's foot was on his chest. He stared at her nervously, into her triumphant green

eyes, and he wished very much he had stayed in his house all day. "Er... good...kung...fu?"

"Precisely," Feizhi removed her foot and Felix thankfully got to his feet. The Xianese girl turned and walked back down the steps, Felix dazedly following, still a little shellshocked from being pinned to the ground. He did not notice Ivan and Sheba struggling past him, wrestling a chest between the two of them. Had he bothered to examine closely, he would have noticed that it was tied up with ropes for some reason. "Where are those stupid escorts?" Feizhi grumbled, looking at the gate. Her eyes lit up as she noticed people coming towards the gate. "Aha!"

"Miss Feizhi!" The escorts cried out, tumbling through the gate and rushing towards her. "Are you okay? Are you hurt? Where did you go? What are you doing here?" Feizhi rolled her eyes as the questions rolled over her, and the escorts soon looked at Felix. "Did you help her? Who are you? You're not Isaac, are you?"

'3...2...1...' "AAAAAAGGGGGHHHHH!!!!" Felix screamed. "I'm Felix not Isaac!" He turned and ran, almost ready to explode at being asked if he was Isaac. The day was already one of the worst ever, now that some silly buffoon had thought he was Isaac. He really wished people would stop assuming he was a pirate king with a stalking tendency. Felix, Jenna, Sheba, Picard and Kraden knew well about Isaac being the Pirate King after beating Deadbeard, they just hadn't told him yet, they had hoped the pirates would catch up and tell Isaac first. Jenna thought it was a pity, she wanted to tease Isaac about being the king of the pirates.

"Er... I think that's Felix, not Isaac?" Feizhi shrugged, smiling. "Excuse his... er, reaction, it would seem that after I mistook him for Isaac, he's a little bit touchy about it. Hey! I

forgot to ask him what he did with my Golden Ring!" Realising the escorts were still asking questions, she snapped. "Yes! I'm FINE!" This did not have the desired effect though, as they decided to be worried about her being angry and ask even more questions.

"Well, well, well," Picard was standing at the top of the steps, arms folded and a very devious smile on his handsome face. Felix stopped in front of him and scowled as Picard continued to talk. "It looks like you're getting chatty with Feizhi. I'm disappointed, you're attracting better girls than me. How do you do it?" Felix's scowl just became even angrier and he shoved Picard aside, stomping off. "Well! You need to learn some manners!"

"I hate, hate, hate this," Gareth moaned, mopping up the kitchen floor. "That idiot Aaron just had to eat way too much ice cream last night and spoil the floor, giving me extra work to do. It's so unfair."

"I don't think he originally planned to throw up," Jenna attempted to console her distressed boyfriend. "And after this, there's only four days left of chores."

"Four days seems like an eternity," Gareth whined. "That Kay's so mean!"

"Hey," Jenna frowned as she thought of something. "Why is Kay making you do the chores anyway?"

Gareth looked up and opened his mouth, before closing it again, his eyes widening in horror as Jenna began to get the 'You better tell me before I hurt you' look. Fortunately, that life-threatening moment was disrupted by two Jupiter Adepts rushing through the door with a now untied treasure chest and slamming it down on the kitchen floor.

"Hey!" Gareth growled. "I just mopped that area!"

"Hey!" Ivan pouted and tried to look as sad as possible. "I've saved you from having to confess to Jenna twice, you could at least be thankful..."

"Grr..." Gareth clenched his fists and scowled.

"Did you like the dolly?" Jenna asked Sheba with a sadistic smile on her face. "I worked very hard on it."

"We're sorry," Ivan and Sheba said together. Gareth and Jenna were lost for words, staring dumbstruck at the two Jupiter Adepts who looked back solemnly, pointed at the treasure chest. "For you." Then they turned and left the house slowly, closing the door behind them. Isaac was just coming up and he was surprised to see them bursting into hysterical laughter, but he did not ask why.

"A gift?" Jenna snorted derisively. "It's probably just an empty chest, they're trying to trick us, but I can see right through their evil plan."

"Ooh, I wonder what's in it?" Gareth dropped the mop which clattered to the floor and he crept over to the treasure chest, reaching out to lift the lid.

"Garet..." Jenna said warningly. She froze as the treasure chest blinked... blinked?! "GARET! DON'T! IT'S A-"

The Treasure Chest leapt up onto its legs, arms waving in the air and 'lid' flapping open and shut as Gareth stared openmouthed at what had once resembled a treasure chest, but rather than just any treasure chest it was now just a...

"Mimic..." Jenna said wearily, as the Mimic clattered loudly and advanced towards Gareth who let out a yell and got to his

feet, backing away from the Mimic.

"They tricked us!" Gareth yelled. "Ivan and Sheba tricked us! I knew it was a trick!"

"Actually, I knew it was a trick," Jenna argued. "You clearly didn't think so, otherwise you wouldn't have bothered to open it!"

"Hey!" The Mimic was now running into chairs and knocking them over. "Stop that!" Gareth yelled. "I've got to clean up this stupid kitchen! Watch, I'm going to use my Psynergy on this horrible beast, how about a nice Lique-"

"I don't think so, Gareth," Kay rebuked him, walking into the kitchen and staring at the Mimic. "You get this thing out of here right now, and don't even think about burning the kitchen down. Fire Psynergy is not allowed inside, unless it's in a fireplace!"

"Oh..." Gareth drooped. "But how am I supposed to get it out of here?"

"Hey, Mimic, you smell, hey, mimic!" Jenna taunted, standing in front of the door. However, the mimic was invulnerable to insults and did not turn around. "Hey... it's ignoring me! I don't like being ignored!"

"Ooh, what's that?" Aaron walked into the room and stared wide-eyed at the dancing chest. Before anybody could stop him, he had already rushed over and tried to pat it. Unfortunately, it seemed that the Mimic did not like children and clamped itself on his arm. Aaron's eyes grew even bigger and started to well up.

"Oh, shoot!" Gareth angrily kicked a chair. "HEY!!! Let go, you stupid Mimic!" He proceeded to kick the Mimic which let go

and turned around to face him. "Yeah, I'm talking to you, you stupid chest!"

"OWWWWW!!!" Aaron screeched, waving his arm about and knocking yet another chair over. "That hurt! Meanie Mimic!" He managed to cast a very weak Flare but the Mimic barely noticed as it advanced on Gareth.

"No Psynergy in the kitchen!" Kay shouted. "How many times must I say it? Do something about that stupid chest!"

"Dragon Fume!" Jenna yelled, running at the Mimic. A fiery dragon hit the Mimic and it stopped in its tracks, looking displeased and turning to face Jenna.

"Jenna!" Kay also turned to look at Jenna. "I SAID-"

"But I only hit the Mimic!" Jenna protested, pulling out her staff and whacking the Mimic backwards with it. "This is going to take a while. Come on, Gareth, think of this as a chore, and you've got to do it... for some reason I STILL don't know."

"Um, yeah, heh heh..." Gareth chuckled nervously, drawing his sword and preparing to do battle with the rabid living treasure chest.

"Felix!"

Felix happened to be just standing near his house, watching a squirrel dancing around in a tree and wondering if it was the same one that had thrown the apple, when he heard the shout and turned around, looking horrified.

"Um... what is it?" Felix asked nervously, wishing people would quit bugging him and leave him alone. How did Picard manage to avoid his fangirls?

"I just..." Feizhi stopped and turned around to see her escorts standing behind her. One of them was coughing loudly. "What do YOU want? Leave us in peace!"

"But, Miss Feizhi," One escort protested. "Is it safe for you?"

"Allow me to demonstrate," Feizhi lunged forwards and within seconds, she was holding the escort by his arms over the river, his feet just on the bank. "If I let go, you'd fall in. You couldn't defend or anything. Get the message?"

"Y-yes!" The scared escort squeaked. "I get it!"

"Now," Feizhi pulled the escort away and pushed him back to his group. "You lot go and reserve rooms in the inn or something. I have to talk to Felix about something, so please leave otherwise I shall be cross." The escorts didn't bother to ask questions, they simply turned and ran back towards the plaza.

'I'm scared!' Felix thought, shivering. "What did you want to talk about?" He had a pretty good guess however.

"The RING," Feizhi said meaningly. The air temperature dropped, making the two Adepts shiver, and a girl popped out of a well somewhere. "The Golden Ring that I gave you to give to Isaac."

"Oh, that," Felix licked his lips and tried to think of the best excuse. In the end, he decided to try and win her over with the truth. "I'm sorry, but Sheba, one of our group, she liked the ring so much she wanted to keep it, and we were so busy, it slipped our minds to tell Isaac about the ring."

"Oh..." Feizhi blinked and shrugged. "Well, at least Isaac knows now, but unfortunately I don't stand a chance with

him. I hope Sheba put the ring to good use, I did spend a very long time making it, and it should be worth it."

"You do Kung Fu and make jewellery," Felix shook his head. "What else do you do?"

"Hmm..." Feizhi grinned. "I see the future."

"What do you see?" Felix asked.

"I see..." Feizhi closed her eyes and an image floated into her mind. "I see a girl coming from the direction of a well!! I think it's a girl, they've got long hair and it's all over their face... it's very frightening... are there any wells in the village? Oh, and her mother's coming up and yelling at her for going into a well!"

"Er, I don't know anybody with a penchant for wells..." Felix wondered what maniac would be in a well in the first place. Probably the same kind of maniac that liked early mornings. He longed never to be like those maniacs.

"Hurray! We did it!" Gareth and Jenna cheered, as the Mimic disappeared from sight, having been defeated in battle. Aaron was lying on the floor, having been hit by the Mimic's Sleep psynergy, and Kay was getting redder in the face every minute as she watched the celebrating Mars Adepts.

"Garet," Kay hissed through gritted teeth. "CHORES!"

"Oh," Gareth looked downcast. "No fair."

"I could always tell..." Kay grinned, opening her mouth wider. "Hey, Jenna-"

"NO!" Gareth wailed. "Don't you dare!"

"This is all Ivan and Sheba's fault," Jenna looked around at the overturned chairs and the sleeping child. "It's all their fault. You know what, Gareth?"

"Huh?" Gareth was currently in the process of uprighting the poor overturned chairs as he stared blankly at his girlfriend.

"This is War," Jenna smirked evilly. "We're going to get... HELP."

"AHEM!" Kay yelled. "You can talk after your chores!"

"Moody old battleaxe," Jenna muttered, stomping past Kay and out of the house, already planning the upcoming war she was going to make happen.

"What? What did you call me?" Kay asked, turning around and watching Jenna retreat with confusion on her face. Then it cleared as she understood exactly what Jenna had just said to her. "HEY!" Kay growled and gave chase, but Jenna had had a head start, so she was pretty far behind even before she exited the house, slamming the door closed.

"Ug... I don't want to get up yet, Mom..." Aaron mumbled sleepily, rolling over on the floor. "Want to sleep more..."

"Aaron... oh, I give up," Gareth proceeded to mop around his little brother, giving him a wide berth, since he really didn't want to wake him up. If he had had his arm bitten by a Mimic, then surely he needed rest? Gareth thought so. He wondered exactly what Jenna meant by help, and hoped that maybe there were going to be more of them against Ivan and Sheba. It was certainly a good idea.

Later on in the day, the Adepts got together, all eight of them, Gareth having finished his chores. It was time to talk

once and for all. The Adept War was dangerously close to commencing, little did Vale know what would hit them.

Hmm, I wonder Adept War... = D

Jenna: Please review. ¬¬'

***Chapter 10*: Chapter 10**

Love Bites

"It seems to me," Felix looked around at the group of Adepts, many of them sour faced. "That there's a little dispute in the group. Let's see..." He held up his hands and counted off his fingers. "Hair dye, bucket of water, deformed doll, Mimic, little notes. And I have a problem with Picard. He is annoying me."

"Oh dear," Picard smirked. "Are you jealous of me having so many fangirls or something?"

"Shut up," Felix growled, shooting a death glare at the Lemurian. "I don't care about your stupid fangirls."

"You just called the majority of girls living in your village stupid," said Isaac quietly. "Now that's loyalty."

Felix only scowled and did not respond.

"Sheba committed a heinous crime," Jenna declared, pointing at the younger Jupiter Adept. "She dared to touch my sacred hair, and I am not letting her get away with that. Or the mimic."

"Yeah!" Gareth glared at Ivan. "That mimic bit my kid brother!"

"Mimics don't have teeth," Mia told him as kindly as she could. "So it was more like clamping."

"Aw, shut up." Gareth sulked.

"He was fine, anyway!" Ivan insisted. "No harm was caused. You can't even come up with decent comebacks... did you expect me to be insulted by a note saying that I smelled of poo? If you really wanted to insult me, you would have called me a short midget or something! You're hopeless."

"I am not!" Gareth wailed. "Take that back... mop head!"

"Mop head? That's smart coming from a guy who looks like his head exploded," Ivan taunted wickedly. "Have you ever used your hair in battle? It sure looks like a dangerous weapon to me."

"Be quiet!" Mia thundered, hitting both boys on the head with her Nebula Wand. "How many times must I break up your stupid disputes? Now, you two, say sorry to each other."

"No!" Gareth and Ivan both flatly refused, turning their backs to each other. Mia sighed.

"This looks like a problem situation," Isaac said despairingly. "Gareth and Jenna are warring with Ivan and Sheba. Felix is being antsy and Picard is winding him up. What are we going to do?"

"Potato head!" Jenna yelled at Sheba. "You look like you've got a salad bowl on your fat head!"

"It's not possible to have a fat head, it goes against the human anatomy rules," Sheba smiled serenely. "And at least I'm not so desperate, I go out with foolish oafs."

"Desperate?" Jenna fumed. "Gareth is witty, charming, loyal, adorable... besides, you don't even have a boyfriend yet! Hah! So there!" She pulled down her bottom eyelid and stuck her tongue out at Sheba.

"Childish tactics..." said Sheba huffily. Jenna growled ominously.

"Having a nice little war, aren't we?" Picard commented. "Look at how much energy they are wasting on their comebacks. They should be wasting it on blowing up Kraden's cottage."

"It's not funny!" Felix yelled. "Isaac blew it up but I still had to help! It wasn't fair!"

"Adept War..." Isaac said thoughtfully, rubbing his chin. His words had a profound effect on the bickering group and everybody turned to look at him, eyes wide. "What did I say?"

"Adept War!" Jenna exclaimed. "Good idea!"

"Huh?" Gareth blinked and then he grinned. "I want to go to war on Ivan!"

"Oh yeah?" Ivan chuckled. "You and whose army?"

"Isaac..." Mia hissed through gritted teeth. "You're starting everybody off again."

"We should split into armies," Felix grinned. "There's eight of us, so we should split into two teams of four."

"I'm with Ivan," Sheba quickly latched herself onto the arm of her fellow Wind Adept. "Obviously."

"We're going to burn you two off the face of Weyard," Jenna threatened, standing next to Gareth. "Who's with us?" She demanded, giving the others threatening looks.

"I'm... with you and Gareth." Felix said finally. He didn't really want to team up with two freaky Jupiter Adepts.

"Then I'm with Ivan and Sheba," Picard took his place next to the two Wind Adepts.

Isaac and Mia were the only ones left. They turned to look at each other in speechless silence. Because of the arrangements of the teams, they would have to be rivalling each other, even though they did not really want that.

"Well?" Jenna asked. "Pick a side already!"

"Come on, Isaac!" Gareth exclaimed. "You should be with me, Jenna and Felix... and we'll be the Valean team!"

"Mia..." Isaac spoke in an apologetic tone. "I..."

"It's okay, Isaac," Mia smiled. "It's just a little bit of fun. I don't mind." She took a deep breath and walked over to join Picard, Ivan and Sheba. As Isaac grouped with Felix, Jenna and Gareth, she threw him a longing look which nobody saw.

"Please tell me this isn't happening," Isaac mumbled under his breath. "We're having a war..."

"It's war!" Jenna yelled.

"Yeah!" Gareth agreed, punching the air. "We're gonna be the winning team!"

"That's what you think!" Ivan taunted.

"We're the best!" Sheba declared. "You're the losers!"

"We should name our teams," Picard advised. "What do you think?"

"We're Team Vale!" Felix spoke up. "No argument there!"

"Excuse me, did we nominate you as leader?" Isaac asked. A look from Felix promptly warned him that it would be advisable to shut up and he did so, wishing very much that he was at home or somewhere safer.

"Picard should be our leader," Sheba suggested. "He's the oldest."

"How old are you anyway, Picard?" Ivan asked, his mouth curling into a wicked smile.

"That information is classified," said Picard stiffly. "I'll be the leader. Hmm... we are a combination of Mercury and Jupiter Adepts. Wind and Water..."

"Vapour?" Mia suggested tentatively. "Or mist... fog... haze... steam..."

"I like Haze," Sheba said immediately. "It sounds nice... not just because I have a Djinni of the same name, honest."

"So, Team Haze it is then," Picard declared. "Team Vale and Team Haze."

"We need rules," Felix spoke decisively. "Any ideas?"

"How about the two teams can't speak to each other?" Jenna suggested. "Then Sheba can't talk to me or anything. She's very annoying when she opens that stupid mouth of hers."

"Notion seconded," Ivan gave Garet a meaningful look. Garet only looked confused as he wondered what the heck Ivan had said and what it had meant.

"But-!" Isaac protested. "You can't-!"

"That's not fair..." Mia protested. "Not everybody is fighting with each other so badly they have to cease conversation with each other!" She frowned. "Like me and Isaac."

"Tough," Gareth shrugged. "Besides, I like the idea of Ivan not being able to say stupid things to me."

"Fine, rule number one is not to talk with each other," Felix waved his hand dismissively. "Any others?"

"Psst," Ivan grinned wickedly, poking Sheba to get her attention. "Garet oinks like a pig."

"I do not!" Gareth raged at Ivan, looking ready to pounce on him and tear him apart.

"Oi!" Jenna diverted Gareth's attention. "You are not allowed to speak to anybody on Team Haze, remember? We made that rule just a few seconds ago, remember?"

"But-" Gareth protested, pointing at Ivan with a desperate look on his face. "The midget..."

"I know, Gareth," Jenna smiled fondly. "Just ignore the midget. He's not worth it. Besides we're having a war now, we can get our own back on those annoying blondes."

"No more suggestions?" Picard asked, looking at his team. They all shook their heads. "Fine."

"This isn't fair..." Isaac muttered. "I never asked to be in the Adept war..."

"We should start tomorrow," said Felix. "The Adept War."

"After I've finished my chores of course," Gareth said miserably. "I'm sick of stupid chores."

"And we still don't know why you're doing chores," Jenna spoke dangerously. "Don't forget, I still intend to find out." Gareth gulped, a bead of sweat trickling down his head.

"Tomorrow," Picard said to Ivan, Sheba and Mia. Ivan and Sheba nodded eagerly. Mia could only nod her head slightly, a glum expression fixed on her face. She didn't like the idea of not being able to talk to Isaac.

And thus, Team Vale and Team Haze went their separate ways, going off to plot for tomorrow when the battle would begin. Most of them had firmly resolved not to talk to each other, but some had their doubts. Mia was now wearing a devious grin which nobody saw. She had found a loophole.

"Mom, can you please ask Mia to pass the salt?" Isaac asked over dinner. The dratted salt shaker just had to be out of his reach, it was only a few centimetres away from his finger. He didn't think casting Catch would go down very well with anybody at the table so that was out.

"Why don't you ask her yourself?" Dora asked of her son, giving him a strange look.

"We are... sort of having a dispute," Mia answered for him. "We aren't allowed to talk to each other."

"Why is that?" Kyle looked curious.

"It's an Adept War," Isaac explained. "It's kind of like Felix, Jenna, Gareth and I are opposing Picard, Sheba, Ivan and Mia, and we're not allowed to talk to anybody on the opposing team. It's all Jenna's fault for suggesting it, and my fault just because I said 'Adept War' and Felix's fault for liking the idea, Ivan's for seconding the vote..."

"Ahh, a little game," Dora nodded, smiling. "I see. Kids and their little games... but it's just a game, you know? It's not real, so don't take it too seriously okay?"

"It's not like we're happy with not being allowed to talk to each other," Mia reached out and pushed the salt shaker towards Isaac who gleefully picked it up and dusted his meal with salt. "But it's a rule."

"So... what do you do in this war thing?" Kyle asked.

"We're having a battle tomorrow," Isaac answered. "I'm not sure what we'll be doing though."

"Don't play too roughly," Dora lectured him. "It's just a silly game."

"Yeah..." Isaac chewed on his food, looking a little anxious.

Later, Isaac and Mia found themselves standing on the landing, preparing to go to their separate rooms. However, for some reason, they were standing there just staring at each other. There had been no rule stated that team rivals could not look at each other after all. Then Mia broke into a grin and withdrew a slip of paper from her pocket. Isaac looked confused, his mouth dropping open as Mia enfolded him in a hug, slipped the paper into his hand and then retired to her room, closing the door behind her.

Isaac frowned, unfolding the slip of paper and he intently read Mia's neat, curly handwriting.

'Isaac, guess what? I found a loophole in the rule that says we are not allowed to talk to each other. Get it? We're not allowed to TALK to each other. There's no rule saying we can't engage in bodily contact or write to each other! So if

we have something to say to each other, just whip out the paper and pen and get scribbling!'

Isaac grinned and folded up the paper, putting it into his pocket and going into his own room. He and Mia were probably better off than nearly everybody else anyway. Felix had to share with Picard and Jenna had to share with Sheba after all. It was quite fortunate for Gareth he didn't have to share with Ivan, not to mention that the consequences would be pretty disastrous anyway.

Now he just had to worry about the Adept War tomorrow.

Garet was also worrying, Jenna was asking more often why he was being blackmailed by his sister. If only he had hid his diary better... he supposed maybe it hadn't been a good idea to leave it lying on the floor, considering it was really a big notebook with 'Garet's Diary' scrawled on the cover in black marker.

***Chapter 11*: Chapter 11**

Love Bites

As Isaac woke up, he realised his pulse was racing and his mouth and throat were dry. He was nervous, that was the problem. Isaac wiped his sweaty brow on his pyjama sleeve and groggily got out of bed, trying to recall why he was nervous on this fine morning. Opening the curtains revealed to Isaac that it was not such a fine morning after all, the sky was clouded over and it looked like it was going to rain.

Then Isaac remembered that the Adept War was beginning today and his spirits sank considerably lower. He sat back down on his bed and put his head in his hands, wishing very much that he could go to sleep and forget all about it, but then Team Vale might be out to get him. He would rather not find out what happened if he got Felix, Jenna AND Gareth mad, he valued his life above most things after all.

"Why me?" Isaac wailed, falling back onto the bed and yelling at the ceiling as if it was the ceiling to blame for all that was happening to him. "I must be cursed or something!" At the rate things were going, he might as well find Dullahan alive and lurking in his closet and then be sent on a quest to save the world all by himself with a hundred Deadbeards standing in his way.

A paper plane sailed through the door, did two neat loops through Isaac's room and then landed square on his forehead. Isaac blinked a few times, figured out that there was paper on his head, sat up so that it fell onto his lap and he picked it up, unfolding it to reveal another note from Mia.

'Good to see you're awake, Isaac! Remember to eat a good breakfast, we'll need plenty of energy for the war! Who knows what we'll be doing? Hopefully we're not going to do anything too violent, that wouldn't be very nice would it? Cheer up, think of it as a fun game, it's not like a real war. I hope I won't have to see one, but since we did unleash Alchemy, who knows? I hope that your mom isn't going to make pancakes this morning!'

Isaac chuckled at Mia's humorous note, feeling considerably lighter than he had a moment ago, and he placed it on his dresser before going to his closet to get his clothes. Luckily, Dullahan was not hiding in the closet so Isaac could safely get dressed and try not to worry too much about the Adept War as he did so.

Garet was in a mad rush, performing his chores at what he hoped was the speed of light. He lazily ran around the kitchen with mop in hand, shook the dishes around under the tap and beat them up with the dishcloths before throwing them in the cupboard, kicked various objects under his bed, sloppily rushing through things. He did not wish to delay the Adept War because of his stupid chores, he wanted to get it over and done with as soon as possible.

'The quicker I get rid of that midget, the better!' Garet thought eagerly to himself, throwing the cutlery into the cutlery drawer with a loud clatter and slamming the drawer shut with a loud bang. 'I don't care if I haven't done a perfect job, I need to start plotting the ultimate revenge on Ivan! Hah hah!'

At last, Garet finished his chores in his own special way and he collapsed on the couch with a heavy sigh. Doing chores was quite exhausting and the bad thing was that he still had three days left now. But at least it was stopping Kay from

telling Felix that Gareth wanted to ask Jenna to marry him. Gareth was pretty sure that Felix would try to kill him if he found out and that was so scary, it made Gareth curl up into a ball and whimper.

Felix was scared too as he woke up that morning, awakening to the harmonious sound of Picard muttering in his sleep. Something about conspiracies, which Felix really did not wish to know about. He was scared of two things. He was scared because he had to lead a team in a war today and he was not used to wars, even if he was such a good leader in his own opinion. The other reason Felix was scared was because a purple haired lunatic by the name of Feizhi was running around. What if she tried to join in or something? That thought was just too scary.

'Maybe we can scare her off,' Felix hoped desperately, clutching his duvet tightly on his hands. 'Maybe we'll go and throw powerful Psynergy all over the place...' His hopes faded as he realised what a stupid idea it was, they would only end up blowing Vale to smithereens and risk hurting innocent bystanders, even if they were all Adepts too.

'Why do I have to lead the team anyway?' Felix sighed, sitting up in bed and anxiously running his hands through his hair as he liked to do so often. 'Just because I'm the oldest... besides, it wasn't my idea, it was Isaac's... He said Adept War, not me... he really knows how to start things off doesn't he?' Felix still had not completely forgiven Isaac for the cottage thing. 'Oh well, sitting here and moping isn't going to change anything...' He thought mournfully, throwing back the duvet and proceeding to pick up his clothes, wondering who that was yelling and screaming.

"It's the Adept War today!" Jenna yelled, positively springing out of bed and hitting the floor with a loud thud. She

jumped up and down on the floor whooping eagerly. "Team Vale's going to win today! Sheba's going to be such a loser!" Jenna threw her head back and laughed.

"Somebody's on a sugar high," Sheba murmured sleepily, trying to ignore Jenna's direct insult, which was her way of insulting Sheba without talking directly to her. "I do wish she would shut up..."

"It's the Adept War today! Adept War!" Jenna was already getting dressed, a crazy grin on her face. She really was looking forwards to kicking Ivan and Sheba's backsides, they deserved it after all they had done to her and Gareth after all.

"Ugh..." Sheba winced, pulling her duvet over her head and praying for sleep to take her back, she really could not handle Jenna's insane screaming this morning. She was excited about the war, but not as much as Jenna was. Jenna was so excited, she was completely crazy.

Little did Felix know that his dream was going to come truer than he thought, and he wasn't even doing anything about it at the moment, just getting dressed and cursing his bad luck. No, Gareth had not decided he would not propose to Jenna. No, the Adept War had not been called off and neither had Isaac decided he would be the leader instead of Felix.

The purple haired lunatic, Feizhi, was even more of a lunatic than he could have guessed. The bad thing about Feizhi was that she liked to get up quite early. She had a very strict regime. Early night, wake up exactly eight hours later although how she could time eight hours when watches were not invented yet was anybody's guess, spend some time working out and beating up anybody who happened to be nearby (in this case it happened to be the escorts) and then she would go for a walk.

That was what Feizhi was doing as Vale awoke, cursing the sun for coming up and awakening most of them, before most of them just pulled the duvet over their heads and went back to sleep. Feizhi was walking through the village, wondering what the excited screams coming from a certain house were all about. Little did she know that she was coming too close to a certain roofless cottage. A cottage that could only spell out doom.

Kraden was grumpy, he had the nagging feeling that due to the consistency of clouds in the sky, it would surely become too much and it would rain heavily. Since he was without a roof, his precious books would risk getting wet and the rain might spoil his chemicals. What would he do then? His whole life's work could be spoilt. Kraden was sitting on his doorstep being grumpy, then he realised that he felt like talking, and joy of joys, somebody was coming towards him.

"Good morning," Kraden jumped to his feet. "It is that time at which the sun has escalated to glimpse upon our world and the night has departed. I am quite fond of this time of the day, it is when we possess the illumination we long for by night even though we do get that by Sol glancing off Luna as I believe is so, and you may call it moonlight yet funnily enough it is sunlight rebounding off the moon, do you not think that strange? Since I wish to confabulate with a fellow philanthropic, you will have to do, and I speculate that it is quite fascinating to espy an avian creature, which I do assume is a biological organism known as a sparrow, soaring into the firmament at precisely 10.34213409942394000 mph!"

Feizhi could not speak, she was rooted to the spot by the power of Kraden's vocal cords vibrating and making a sound... sorry, Kraden talking. Her eyes were as wide as

saucers and her mouth was hanging open as she stared at Kraden with a horrified expression. As Kraden continued to natter on and on about things which really did not matter, she trembled then her emergency nervous system kicked into action and commanded Feizhi to get out of there.

"AAAARRRRRRRGH!!!" Feizhi screamed at the top of her voice, turning and fleeing through Vale at what was somewhat closer to the speed of light. She came to a screeching halt in the plaza and ran into the inn to alert her badly bruised escorts of a terrible danger lurking in the village. Who could have known that Vale possessed the most lethal weapon in the whole of Weyard?

The escorts proceeded to ask more questions, mostly about why she had beaten them up and not some poor innocent Valean, and why she was screaming at the top of her lungs like that. Feizhi as usual brushed off their questions and proceeded to drag them all out of Vale, desperate to get as far away from the overly talkative old man as quickly as possible.

"...and that is why nowadays when people see a bovine creature with head appendages that happen to crinkle horizontally, they proceed to scream their heads off and decamp with excessive needfulness to the closest district they can discover for their security... now where did the philanthropic with the purple hair who happened to be of the feminine gender I was conversing with happen to go? That was quite rude... and when am I going to get a new roof?" Kraden wondered huffily, while the author got a headache from overusing a thesaurus. The translation of what Kraden said is "That's why now when people see a cow with horns curling sideways, they scream and run for the nearest village for safety."

Felix felt strangely happy as he stepped out of his bedroom without knowing why he suddenly felt happy. The effect was somewhat spoilt as Jenna barged right past him, screaming excitedly about Adept Wars, and Felix proceeded to sail backwards into his bedroom, crashing into his bed. The sound of the impact woke Picard up and he started yelling a complaint. Felix hurriedly crawled out before Picard could see him and declare war on him- Felix smacked himself as he remembered they were already going to have a war today. With that, the bruised Venus Adept made his escape, unhappy that his first wound- even just a little bruise- had been caused by a member of his own team... not to mention it was his sister.

"I'm going to maim whoever woke me up!" Picard yelled, obviously not being a morning person on today of all days. "I am going to find out who roused me from my sleep and I am going to beat the stuffing out of them and make them pay for it, and I'll make them cry and beg forgiveness, and they will bow to me and be my slave, and I will make them polish my boots! It's a heinous crime! Nobody should dare to wake up I, the great Picard! It is a travesty because-"

"Picard, shut up," Sheba was at the door. She threw a sock at Picard who blanched at the rancid item of clothing and hurriedly tossed it back. Unfortunately, Sheba was already gone by the time the smelly sock reached the place where she had once stood. Picard sighed mournfully and got out of bed, ready to face the day and lead his team in the Adept War.

Now the Adept War was ready to begin, as all eight Adepts were arranged in their respective teams. First they just had to discuss what to do. They had not accounted for the problems that would arise due to the 'no talking to each other' rule Mia had so cleverly found a loophole in and what

would happen if for instance Picard wanted a water balloon fight or Felix wanted a game similar to Tag except Psynergy was used. Only weak Psynergy of course. Hopefully.

"Whatever we're doing today," Ivan smiled confidently.
"We're going to win it! Team Vale will be such losers!"

"Yes, and we have a good leader!" Mia added. She casually glanced away, caught Isaac's eye and winked, before looking away again. It would not do to be caught communicating in that way after all.

"Pow pow Picard!" said Sheba suddenly, dissolving into giggles. "Pow pow Picard!"

"Where did you come up with that?" Picard asked, raising an eyebrow, placing his hands on his hips.

"It just sounded good!" Sheba cackled. "Pow pow Picard! You're the leader, you need the proper enthusiasm, don't you?"

"Pow pow Picard!" Mia and Ivan took up the cry, and now all three were chanting it while Picard just stared at them helplessly, fazed by the onslaught of "Pow Pow Picard!" that he was suddenly dealing with.

"Do they really think that shouting stupid things is going to make them better?" Garet muttered sourly, glaring at Team Haze with a look that could kill. "I don't think so."

"Just ignore them, Garet," Jenna wrapped her arms around him and they kissed passionately, forgetting everything around them in an instant. Isaac and Felix looked at each other, rolling their eyes.

"Honestly, at this rate, they'll probably be married next week," Isaac joked. He froze as a distant memory came to him... oh, that's right... Gareth was planning to propose to Jenna, Felix was worried Gareth was considering it, Kay was blackmailing Gareth into doing the chores by threatening to tell Felix... Oops. "Just kidding..."

"I hope so," Felix threw Isaac a baleful look, which made him quake in his boots. "This is getting nowhere fast."

"What?" Isaac stared at him in confusion. "The Adept War?" Felix nodded. "I can see what you mean. More than half of Team Haze is screaming 'Pow Pow Picard' and we've got two team members who are too busy sucking each other's faces off. Can't you two just get a room?"

"This is sickening," Felix grumbled.

"The only real kiss I've had so far was from some crazy obsessed fangirl..." Isaac exhaled heavily.

"Fangirl?" Felix raised an eyebrow. "Come to think of it, where are Picard's fangirls?"

"Feizhi," Isaac winced. "And the worst thing was that Mia saw..." Felix shot a look at him and he flushed. "D-don't mention anything... I never said anything... honest..."

"You care that Mia saw," Felix smirked. "So why aren't you with her yet then?"

"Ssh!" Isaac hissed. "Let's just discuss what we're doing today! Sheesh... I can't even say anything without people picking at my thoughts... and anyway we're not allowed to talk to each other because of this stupid war."

"Hmm..." Jenna finally let go of Gareth, looking pensive. "We should just do what Adepts are good at."

"Well, it's not speed in my case," Gareth chuckled sourly. "What do you mean?"

"Psynergy," Jenna shot him a withering look. "Silly Gareth..." She knocked on his head with a fist. "Hello? Anybody home?"

"Ha ha..." Gareth snorted. "I think I'm at home, but I'll get back to you on that."

"Use Psynergy?" A slow smile spread on Isaac's face. "Hey... haven't you noticed that here on Team Vale, we're only weakest to each other's Psynergy, same on Team Haze? So nobody could get too badly hurt, right?"

"I'm all for it," Felix spoke dreamily. "Blasting Picard into the air with a big Grand Gaia sounds just fine to me. That will teach him to quit nagging me about girls."

"We should use our Psynergy, " Ivan picked up on Team Vale's idea and he decided he might as well use this little loophole in the rule. "Run around throwing Psynergy everywhere!"

"POW POW PICARD!" Mia and Sheba shouted at the top of their voices, jumping up and down excitedly.

"Yes, I like that idea," Picard agreed wearily. "Mia, Sheba?" The girls promptly stopped shouting and nodded eagerly. "Well, it's decided for Team Haze. I wonder about Team Vale."

"Psynergy it is then!" Felix declared. "And we're going to win this one! It could be like Psynergy Tag, and we'll run around the village trying to hit each other with Psynergy... but we

have to be careful not to hit innocent villagers." Everybody nodded... even Team Haze. It seems that listening to Felix got to be a bit of a habit considering he led them all on the quest.

And so, Team Haze and Team Vale set off in different directions, ready to begin. Basically, they would just run around the village hitting each other with their Psynergy. The team with the most points, points gained from hitting opposition with Psynergy, would be the winning team.

***Chapter 12*: Chapter 12**

Love Bites

"Spark Plasma!" Sheba yelled, blowing up an innocent juniper which had only happened to be rooted there. Jenna was standing about five metres away and laughed hard as she cast Flare Storm, before running off. Sheba yelped and narrowly dodged the Flare Storm, glaring evilly at the retreating Jenna's back.

"Don't think you'll get away that easily!" Sheba yelled, giving chase and trying to aim a Ray at her. Unfortunately, Gareth proceeded to get in the way and shout before casting Flare on her. Then Ivan appeared and cast Plasma on Gareth. The Mars and Jupiter Adepts had a brief tussle of Psynergy before splitting once more to get to safer ground.

Isaac slipped behind a tree, watching Mia walking through the village and looking out for Team Vale. He didn't really want to chuck Psynergy at her, and he knew that she didn't want to do it to him either. So, what better than just hiding from each other and pretending that they hadn't been able to find each other? Isaac smiled and sneaked behind a bush, walking along with Mia. He felt like a stalker, but he was pretty well practised in it. He tried stalking Jenna in Madra and Picard in Naribwe, for reasons which nobody would ever know. It sure was fun asking questions about people.

"Grand Gaia!" Felix yelled, pursuing the Lemurian. Picard snorted and simply dodged aside as the ground blew up. Felix was about to try again, but was promptly assailed by pebbles thrown by a horde of Picard fangirls who were trying to help Picard whin for some reason. "That's not fair!" Felix exclaimed, throwing a glare at the fangirls.

"All's fair in love and war, and this is war!" Picard shouted with laughter in his voice, running on ahead and disappearing into shrubbery. He did quite love having his fangirls helping him out by stopping poor Felix. After all, there had been no rule stated that nobody could have help from people outside the teams.

"That Lemurian..." Felix growled. He promptly turned and cast Quake on the shouting fangirls, sending them falling onto their backsides. They glared evilly at him as he gave chase after Picard, vowing that it would be worse next time if they tried to help Picard again. Hey, they were Valeans, they were Adepts so they could handle it... right? Of course. So they wouldn't have problems with a big Grand Gaia... no, really.

'It's so quiet,' Mia frowned as she walked along a path, glancing furtively around for members of Team Vale who might ambush her, not noticing Isaac hurriedly dart behind a tree. All she could hear were the insane screams of the rabid Picard fangirls, no doubt fighting back to protect the leader of Team Haze. She guessed that Ivan and Sheba would most likely be targeting Garet and Jenna, and Picard would probably have to be fending off Felix, so where was Isaac?

"Dratted Jupiter Adept!" Jenna shouted, throwing down a Fume at the fleeing Sheba. It was so unfair that Sheba was faster than her, but she supposed that it was worse for Garet. He was extremely slow, second only to Picard, while Ivan was almost as speedy as Sheba. In fact, Ivan was far ahead of them and Garet was some way behind, muttering curses under his breath. "Come on, Garet, you're so slow! Are you wearing Turtle Boots?"

"Hah hah," Gareth stopped next to her and kneeled over, hands on knees, as he tried to get his breath back. "Give me some Hyper Boots and then I'll show that pest Ivan what I'm made of. Have you actually managed to hit Sheba yet?" He looked up wonderingly at his girlfriend.

"I wish..." Jenna muttered, running a hand through her long reddish brown hair. "Ivan and Sheba are just too quick. Maybe we should be targeting Mia or Picard instead, at least they are slow. But then Isaac and Felix would have to deal with Ivan and Sheba, and they wouldn't do any better than I am right now..."

"Lets' just forget about those Jupiter Adepts and go for the Mercury Adepts!" Gareth exclaimed gleefully, his eyes shining. "I'll bet that Isaac's not even attacking Mia because he fancies her, so we'll go and get Mia instead!" He looked as if he had just discovered gravity for the very first time from the look on his face.

"Good idea," Jenna did a high-five with him. "That will be a piece of cake! Now lets' go and find Mia and give her a toasting!"

Ivan and Sheba stared as Gareth and Jenna rushed off in the opposite direction, away from them. Then the two Jupiter Adepts turned to stare at each other with blank, confused expressions, neither of them understanding just what was going on. Surely Gareth and Jenna were meant to be chasing them, not running away?

"Sheba...?" Ivan ventured, a bead of sweat running down his head. "Do you know...?"

"No, I don't know," Sheba shook her head. "That was so weird... well, lets go and find Isaac and Felix and get THEM

instead if Gareth and Jenna are so reluctant to fight us anymore. How about that?"

"Sure," Ivan rushed off to find the Venus Adepts with Sheba in pursuit. "I'll bet Felix's gotten a double beating from Picard's fangirls by now... it would probably be kinder to go for Isaac wouldn't it... unless we're trying to be cruel?" He cackled maniacally and stopped as Sheba threw a glance over her shoulder at him, clearly asking if he had gone insane.

"Look, there's Mia!" Gareth exclaimed softly as the Mercury Adept came walking towards him and Jenna. She had not noticed them yet since they were hiding behind trees, out of her sight. "Coming right towards us!"

"Not bad," Jenna grinned widely. "Sounds like the perfect ambush to me..." She frowned as she saw Isaac also behind a tree, secretly following Mia. "What's Isaac doing there? Come on, Gareth, tag Mia before Isaac does!"

"But Isaac's on our team," Gareth looked at her, not understanding her motives for wanting him to get her instead of Isaac, but then again a lot of things didn't make sense to him anyway. "So what does it matter if Isaac tags Mia or we do it instead? Team Vale still gets points, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, but WE want the credit," Jenna smiled evilly, displaying a row of bright white teeth. She looked akin to a grinning crocodile that was about to pounce on its prey. "Why should Isaac get it? Go on, Gareth, tag Mia before Isaac! And that's an order..." Her eyes glinted evilly and Gareth shuddered in fear, turning around to face the unknowing Mercury Adept, little knowing that someone was about to jump out from behind a tree.

"Will you just stop hitting me?" Felix thundered at the rabid fangirls, who were chasing him and throwing pebbles at his back still. Even worse, Picard seemed to have disappeared into thin air so he was left alone with the evil girls. "I haven't even been able to score any points for my team because of you insane... what do you like so much about Picard anyway? He's an annoying jerk- OW!" Another pebble struck him in the forehead.

"We like Picard because..." The fangirls took deep breaths and chanted as one. "Because he's charming, adorable, amazing, sexy, cool, good-looking, handsome, wonderful, awesome, strong, has big pecs, blue-haired, has lovely eyes, has a lovely voice, and he's JUST SO SEXY!" They seemed like they were going to say something else but then they squeaked and screamed instead. "PICARD!!!"

"So there you are," Felix turned and grinned evilly at Picard who had been preparing to attack Felix from behind. He flinched and froze into position, mentally cursing the rabid fangirls for blowing his cover. "Are you ready to be thrown in the air by a nice big Grand Gaia? OWW! Get your stupid fangirls off my back already! This is cheating!"

"No it isn't," Picard said serenely, a calm smile on his handsome face. "There was no rule dictating that we couldn't have help from team outsiders. Do you realise that we happen to be breaking the rule that means no members of either team can speak to the members on the opposing team, Felix?"

"Yeah, well, that stupid rule can just go to heck!" Felix exclaimed. The fangirls gasped in shock and threw more pebbles at him. He threw a baleful look at them over his

shoulder but they did not even flinch under his stare. "It's so unfair! I don't have rabid fangirls going all out to help me!"

"I understand, you're just jealous," Picard smirked, folding his arms across his chest. "That's why you want to spend this entire stupid thing called a 'war' which really is quite pitiful for a war trying to hit me with one of your silly Grand Gaias and only succeeding to be beaten up by my fangirls."

"Beaten up by your..." Felix was almost speechless in shock, his eyes widening. "I am NOT being beaten up by your stupid fangirls!" Another volley of pebbles struck him and he winced. "That does not count as beating up... and where are they getting all those stupid pebbles from anyway?" He glanced at them and realised. "Oh... Venus Adepts... dratted Venus Adepts!"

"I could say the same about you," Picard chuckled. Felix glowered at him and took a threatening step forwards. "Look, really, Felix, I know you're jealous and all that, but holding a grudge against me isn't going to cure anything. I really don't think you're even into this silly little war thing, are you?"

"It's only a game," Felix looked sulky. "It would be a big waste of time to bother with going for Mia, Ivan, or Sheba, when YOU'RE my problem... when does this have to end anyway? I'm getting very bored of being hit by pebbles and listening to you going on and on and on..."

"Speak for yourself," Picard smoothly replied. Felix rolled his eyes and turned away, giving a drooling fangirl an evil stare. "Um... are some of those fangirls drooling?" Felix nodded, not saying anything. "I see... that could be a problem..."

"PICARD!!!" squealed the excited fangirls, rushing forwards and trampling Felix as they threw themselves upon the

Lemurian. Felix slowly picked himself off the ground, battered and bruised by their feet, and blinked weirdly at the pile of girls upon Picard who was desperately trying to break free. "PICARD, PICARD, PICARD!"

"Actually, maybe I'm not so jealous after all," Felix sweated heavily as he saw Picard's predicament. "It seems that the fangirls just managed to get him better than I did. Those fangirls... they always have to have the upper hand, don't they? They stop me and then they stop Picard... pick a side already!"

"Take this!" Gareth yelled, lunging out from behind the tree. Mia jumped, not at all expecting to see a Mars Adept leap out from behind a tree... okay, so her thoughts had drifted from the Adept War to Isaac... but still... "VOLCANO!"

Mia dodged sideways as a plume of fire shot up from the ground, but the shockwave it created still managed to send her flying. Mia screamed as she went sailing off the edge, as they had been on the higher level, and went splashing into the river. Gareth cringed, he hadn't been meaning to send Mia into the river, he just wanted to tag her, and it could have been worse anyway, he could have cast Eruption or Pyroclasm... but he really wasn't that dumb.

"MIA!!!" Isaac came running out from behind the tree and leaped off the small cliff, sailing into the river after Mia, who was simply treading the water as she looked up in consternation at the stunned Gareth. Jenna was now laughing raucously and pummeling Gareth's back as tears of laughter flew from her eyes. Isaac swam through the river towards her, not noticing that she was perfectly fine. "I'll save you!" And Isaac did, sort of. Well, Mia had no objection to Isaac grabbing her around the waist and getting her back onto dry

land. She sat next to the concerned Isaac on the grass, water dripping off the pair.

"Wow..." Ivan was watching from the other side, his eyes widening in shock. "Isaac saved Mia? But isn't that kind of the opposite of what we're meant to do? Somehow? It doesn't seem Gareth did hit her though... heh... he couldn't hit anybody anyway."

"No," Sheba shook her head with a sly smile. "Gareth's just far too slow, Mia's quicker than he is anyway, so it makes sense that he would miss. If he went for Picard on the other hand, then I might just be slightly worried."

"Oh Gareth!" Jenna exclaimed laughingly. "That was just so funny! Did you see the look on Mia's face?" She edged around him and stared at his face, cracking up again. "Your face... it's so funny too!"

"Um, thanks for that, Isaac," Mia smiled fondly at the blond Venus Adept. "I was okay, really, but I do appreciate it. That was nice how you just jumped into the river like that without a second thought, just for me."

"Oh, Mia," Isaac smiled back, his eyes gleaming. "You know I wouldn't just leave you there in the river. I'd do anything for you, whatever happened to you, so of course I jumped into the river for you."

"Isaac..." Mia leaned closer to him, her hand brushing over his.

"Mia..." Isaac also leaned closer, inhaling the perfume that scented her body.

"Isaac..."

"Mia..."

"Um, what's happening?" Garet blurted out. Jenna hit him in the arm and he winced, getting the message as she put her finger to her lips, glaring at him for disrupting a touching moment, before curiously watching the latest development between Isaac and Mia. Ivan and Sheba were also watching quietly, both of them looking immensely shocked.

"Isaac..." Mia said again, then she realised she was getting bored with it. "Oh never mind!" And then Isaac drew her in for a passionate kiss, and they threw their arms around each other, letting passion erupt between the two of them as they finally admitted their feelings for each other through a lingering embrace. They did not hear the whoops coming from the Mars Adepts, the gasps of amazement from the Jupiter Adepts, or the screams of fangirls as Felix and Picard played their own version of Psynergy Tag with them, or the exclamations of the pair as they caught up with the others and watched Isaac and Mia in stunned silence.

"Well, it looks like they FINALLY admitted their feelings for each other," Felix smirked. "That took an age."

"Not kidding," Picard laughed. "Well, I suppose that means the Adept War's over."

"What's the outcome then?" Felix demanded.

"Tie," Picard answered. "No winners, no losers. I figure you'd throw a fit if I said Team Haze, but you can't expect me to say Team Vale won..."

"Are they ever going to come up for air?" Sheba wondered, staring transfixedly at the embracing, newly formed couple.

***Chapter 13*: Chapter 13**

Love Bites

Jenna stood outside Gareth's house the following morning, a frown etched on her forehead. This was Gareth's fifth day of chores now and he still had not taken the time to explain to Jenna exactly why Kay was making him do them. Jenna was unimpressed to say the least. The excitement over Isaac and Mia getting together had been forgotten fast as everybody had expected it to happen anyway.

A wicked glint shone in Jenna's eyes as she started to formulate a cruel master plan in her mind. This excellent plan that the vindictive Mars Adept had cooked up in all of a second would surely involve a kidnapping. Yes, Jenna was going to practice the expertise of kidnapping right now, and she didn't care what anybody else might think of that. Grinning, Jenna strode up to the front door and pushed it open with a loud bang.

Gareth, who was currently wiping the table with a dishcloth, leaped up in fright and yelled in shock as he heard the bang. Gareth had clearly not been expecting to hear a bang and looked around furtively to see what it was. Perhaps he had put a bomb somewhere and forgotten about it, but Gareth could not recall having ever done that before. Jenna came walking into the kitchen and Gareth began to sigh in relief. His relieved sigh was cut off as he saw the demonic look on his girlfriend's face.

"Good morning, Jenna!" Gareth smiled shakily, dropping the dishcloth on the table and taking a quick step backwards. "I'm just busy with my chores as usual. So, uh, what's up?"

"I think you know what's up," Jenna smiled, one eyebrow twitching dangerously.

'Oh, help!' Gareth considered screaming for his mother at the top of his lungs but that was hardly going to impress Jenna. 'Perhaps she found out I wanted to propose to her... but would that really make her angry? Felix's the one who's going to be angry! Maybe I should shout for help...'

"No, no," Gareth shook his head, still smiling. "I'm afraid I don't know what's up, Jenna, what is it?"

"Time and time again," Jenna walked around the table and Gareth hurriedly walked around as well, keeping the table between him and Jenna. He sensed that he had to adopt survival tactics or suffer. "I've asked you why Kay is blackmailing you, what her motives are, yet you refuse to answer. If you don't tell me..."

"Th-then what?" Gareth threw a glance at the dishcloth and wondered if it would make a good defensive unit. He quickly deducted that it was useless and sighed in despair. He was pretty sure that it was not fireproof.

"Oh, Gareth..." Jenna spoke in a syrupy sweet voice, giving him the sweetest smile possible. "I couldn't possibly hurt you... you know I love you..."

"Really?" Gareth stopped in his tracks, nervously allowing her to come closer. She didn't seem quite so harmful now. "Well, heh, course you do..."

"Exactly," Jenna nodded, grinning. "But... I... want you to prove it!"

'Oh no, it's crunch time...' Gareth groaned inwardly. "H-how?"

"You either tell me what Kay's up to or come with me!" Jenna reached out and grabbed the dishcloth, although why she had done such a thing was unclear to her boyfriend. As far as he knew, she had not had a passion for hoarding dishcloths before.

"I'll come with you!" said Gareth quickly. If it was a toss up between going with her somewhere or telling her he wanted to marry her too soon, he knew which one he would rather take. Despite not knowing where Jenna would take him.

"Fine, come with me..." Jenna took him by the hand and led him out of the house, leaving the kitchen dirty and untidy, as well as the rest of the house... well about as dirty and untidy as it could get in 24 hours at any rate.

"Can you believe Mom and Dad?" Isaac shook his head in amazement as he walked out of his house with Mia on his arm. "They acted as if we were getting married."

"Yeah, they were very... happy..." Mia cautiously phrased her sentence... they really had been somewhat overexuberant and even she had been taken aback by it all. "Have you never had a girlfriend before?"

"Not really," Isaac smiled at her. "There has never been any girl as special as you in my whole life."

"You're so corny, Isaac," Mia chuckled. "But that's sweet... thanks."

Isaac was almost dying after Mia said that, his face was going positively beetroot red. "I did mean it... however corny it sounds..."

"Yeah..." Mia leaned against Isaac, looking positively blissful. "I feel like everything's just perfect... now that we're

together, what could possibly go wrong?"

"Mia," Isaac swallowed nervously. "Have you ever heard of the philosophy that says whatever can go wrong will go wrong?"

"You believe that?" Mia looked up at him with a frown. "But what could possibly go wrong?"

"How about that?" Isaac pointed at somebody approaching and Mia groaned as she looked at him, wishing the ground would swallow up her... or him. Perhaps she didn't really want the ground to swallow her up, it might swallow Isaac up too and the less chance her Isaac had of being swallowed up, the better.

"Isaac, tell me I'm dreaming!" She hissed in his ear, throwing a furtive glance at the person who had dared to come near her. "I was hoping he wouldn't return!"

"Well, if you're dreaming, I'm dreaming too..." Isaac muttered back at her. "Alex... which cave did you happen to come out of?"

"I was not in a cave, actually," Alex argued. "I was merely recuperating. Mia, I understand that you may have just felt a little stressed and I apologise if you were shocked by my appearance. I do hope you have had time to get over the glad news that I am alive after the Wise One's blatantly cruel treatment of me."

"Sad more like it..." Mia glowered at him. "Just what are you aiming at now, Alex? World domination? All the gold in the world?"

"The world and its gold cannot compare to you," Alex simpered, a dopey look in his aqua eyes. "You are the

shining beacon I am forever attracted to you, I need nothing but you, my dear beloved Mia."

"Hey, back off!" Isaac cried out angrily, clutching Mia tight. "Mia doesn't go for slimeballs like you, why don't you just go and lurk in some hole in the ground? I'm sure you'd be quite at home there."

"Mia," Alex purposefully ignored the raging Venus Adept. He clasped his hands together and put on the most obnoxious smile he possibly could, as all the smiles he could ever do were obnoxious. For Alex was an obnoxious person. He just didn't get how obnoxious he was. "I have a very deep, personal question to ask you."

"Watch out, he's going to ask how much money you have," Isaac warned. "What else could Alex think is deep and personal?"

"Mia, will you marry me?" Alex fell to his knees and hit the ground with his hands. "PLEASE?"

Isaac and Mia both looked at each other, their looks clearly saying 'Can you believe the nerve of this guy?' Mia sighed, shook her head and looked at Alex who was gazing up at her with teary eyes, like a lovesick puppy. It was sickening, it made her want to vomit... right on him. A thought occurred to her and she smirked evilly. Alex took this as a positive sign and immediately brightened.

"On several conditions... I'll think about it..." Mia said slyly, a perfect plan forming in her mind. Isaac blinked several times in astonishment, but Mia looked at him with an evil, knowing smile and he immediately relaxed, realising she was up to something. Of course she wouldn't even think about marrying him, that was about as likely as Feizhi turning into a man and falling for... no, bad thoughts! Isaac hurriedly

stopped the current flow of thoughts and concentrated on watching the exchange between Alex and Mia.

"Ooh! What conditions?" Alex asked, his mouth stretching into a dopy grin. "What?"

"Hmm..." Mia immediately produced a pad of paper and a pen in a flourish and sat down on the grass, putting the pad on her knee and scribbling away at a speedy rate, her tongue sticking out the side of her mouth, while Isaac wondered where she got the paper and pen from and Alex almost hyperventilated in excitement.

"Felix," Picard approached the Venus Adept who was currently leaning against a tree and worrying. Felix was very good at that and proud of it too. Picard gave him a pleading look and clasped his hands together. "I have something to ask of you."

"Ask away," Felix shrugged wearily. He really wished people would just leave him alone to think and worry, he liked thinking and worrying sometimes. To the best of his knowledge, Gareth never thought and he despaired that Jenna should see anything in an oaf like that. That was one thing to worry about. "But this better not have anything to do with those rabid fangirls. My back still hurts."

"Nonsense, Felix, your back can't still hurt," Picard brushed the trivial matter off airily. Felix just looked away, refusing to answer. "Anyway, after our quick work of those fangirls yesterday, I was wondering if you would like to be my own personal bodyguard."

"Your bodyguard?" Felix scoffed, amused by Picard's suggestion. So amused that for a moment he stopped worrying about incompetent oafs. "You've got to be kidding me... those fangirls can't kill you or anything! Besides, if

they did, they would probably just flood the village with their tears. Maybe you should ask Gareth to be your bodyguard, get him away from my sister for a while, huh?"

"You've got to be kidding me," Picard slapped his forehead. "Jenna would just tag along and then the fangirls would ask her if she loved me too... and since she loves Gareth, she would... hopefully refuse... and then those fangirls would maul her!"

"Oh yeah..." Felix winced. "But look, the fangirls aren't around, that's a plus sign, isn't it?"

"Are you kidding me?" Picard wailed. "They are watching me from their windows, hiding in the treetops and the bushes... waiting to ambush me! Then when there's a good time they somehow flash a signal to each other and then they appear, coming out of the ground and materialising from the trees!"

"You just have an overactive imagination," Felix exhaled deeply. "I've got my own troubles..."

"What, worrying about Gareth proposing to Jenna?" Picard raised an eyebrow. Felix nodded. "You really need to lighten up."

"Lighten up? Me?" Felix frowned. "Yeah right."

"You're hopeless, Felix," Picard said despairingly.

"Yeah? Same goes for you!"

"And you!"

"Wimp!"

"Misery guts!"

"Washed out Mercury Adept!"

The squirrels in the tree started to get tired of Picard and Felix shouting at each other and started flinging apples from the tree tops at the shouting Adepts. They promptly screamed and fled from the fruity missiles. Felix was beginning to get tired of being hit by apple-flinging squirrels and considered forming a plan to get rid of the Evil Squirrels that Fling Apples... he would just need a lot of people to help him... and it probably wasn't likely.

Feizhi nervously stepped into the village of Vale, not sure what to expect. Last time she had been here, so many things had happened including a scary old man trying to talk her to death. At least now she knew to avoid roofless cottages. How could she have been so idiotic? Her escorts trailed behind her, asking her so many questions particularly about why she had come back to Vale after running out so fast yesterday morning... but of course Feizhi ignored them.

In the plaza, everything was quiet, and Feizhi bade the tired escorts get to the inn before she used Kung Fu on them. The terrified escorts immediately fled for the inn and hid underneath the beds, shortly after booking, quaking all over at the thought of Feizhi using her impressive Kung Fu skills on them. They would rather wrestle alligators. Now Feizhi had peace and she was happy.

"Come on, get it in! Yeah, that hole there..."

"Ugh, I can't even see the stupid hole properly, why did we have to do it here?"

"Because it's private!"

"Who's going to have a problem with this?"

Feizhi frowned and inched closer to the bush, wondering who it was talking behind the bush. Where she came from, people did not often talk behind bushes.

"There might be a law against this sort of thing... you know how uptight this village is!"

"Okay, okay, I've found it... so I just stick it in?"

"Haven't you done this before?"

"... Not really..."

"Well, neither have I but I have learnt a lot of things off Kraden. Just push it in and make sure it's secure."

"Like that?"

"Further in!"

"Now?"

"Yes, lovely! You're doing a good job... pack it tightly around there so it won't come out..."

"No way! You do it! I'm so out of here!"

"Get back here, you-"

Ivan did not stop to hear whatever Sheba was about to say as he leaped out from behind the bush and collided with Feizhi, almost knocking her down to the ground. Feizhi stared at him with wide eyes. Ivan stared at her in confusion. "What's wrong?"

"Wh-what were you doing behind the bush?" Feizhi asked hesitantly, doubtfully. At first she had suspected one thing

but visual evidence was now beginning to make it not seem quite so believable.

"Oh, we were planting trees," Sheba popped up from behind the bush with an irritated look on her face. She held up an unplanted, small tree. "Me and Ivan were a bit bored and we went out of the village to uproot some baby trees and take them back here, just to try it out. However, Ivan's being bratty about it."

"Oh..." Feizhi shuddered, going pale. "I just... okay..."

"You weren't thinking anything wrong were you?" Ivan asked narrowly, squinting suspiciously at the Xianese girl.

"Um, bye!" Feizhi immediately disappeared, hurtling off to the inn before the Jupiter Adepts could pose a threat to her.

"Weird girl... seriously, does Vale have a problem against tree planting?" Ivan looked sceptically at Sheba.

"Ivan..." Sheba said in a patient tone. "This is the village that won't even let people out, they get mad if you even get within a one mile radius of Mt. Aleph. They don't even like it if you show Psynergy in front of outsiders and non Adepts can't even see it!"

"They didn't know that," Ivan said defensively. "Maybe we could just ask Gareth's grandfather, he's the mayor and-"

"Ivan," Sheba interrupted. Ivan broke off and gave her a questioning look. "Are you finding this really boring as well?" Ivan nodded and looked down at his dirt stained hands. "Yeah, me too. It was so interesting when we were being evil to Gareth and Jenna... but that's over. I bet even going to Kraden's cottage would be more interesting than

this..." Ivan gasped, clutched his throat and fainted. "... On second thoughts, perhaps not."

***Chapter 14*: Chapter 14**

Love Bites

Mikaa- Okay, that was a very, very long review. Keep it up, your long, long reviews are very interesting indeed for many reasons and if I did keep on like this you could get more than three lines but I might start to sound like Kraden when he decides to go off on one of his infamous rambling sessions and that could be very annoying because Kraden is indeed a very annoying person and I should hate to be associated with a very annoying person simply because nobody likes to be associated with very annoying people. gasps for breath Perhaps Isaac didn't have thoughts about Kay because he's hardly seen her so far anyway and he probably wants to avoid her... just like everybody else! Mia hates Alex, fair as that, and she needs to get rid of him somehow... and due to my inadequate knowledge of Star Trek, those kinds of jokes are fairly unlikely. And speaking of your birthday, Love Bites is being updated on your birthday! How about that? HAPPY BIRTHDAY MIKAA D

Wolf Demon- You'll see this chapter... dishcloths can be so convenient...)

Lord Cynic- Yes, amusing, but I feel Felix's been hurt enough... so far... heh heh...

Jupiter Sprite- Ignoring the incest comment from Mikaa, there will be Windshipping sometime... Ive already got plans for that

"Um, Jenna, just what are you doing?" Gareth asked nervously as Jenna proceeded to loop some rope around him and knot it tightly, binding him to the tree, with his arms fast at his sides. The tree was located just outside the mouth of the Vale cave, beyond the fence, where few people went anyway. "Jenna! I've got to do chores, you can't do this to me!"

"Oh, dear Gareth," Jenna smirked, stepping back and admiring her work, nodding in satisfaction. "I just have a problem with the fact that you refuse to tell me why your sister is making you do chores. If you tell me, then I'll release you and you can go running back to do your lovely chores."

"No!" Gareth exclaimed in immense horror, struggling against desperately against the cruel rope that Jenna had so carefully and so expertly tied, a bead of sweat rolling down his head. "I can't tell you..." Jenna turned away and made as if to walk off. "... My life depends on these chores! If I don't do them, then I'll be in danger!"

"Very funny," Jenna sighed and wiped her brow. "I seriously doubt your sister is capable of murdering you. Somehow I just don't think that's why she's making you do the chores. So, looks like you'll be stuck there for a while... and then we probably will find out what happens if you don't do your chores because you're not doing them today!" Jenna cackled maniacally.

"What if I shout for help and somebody comes to free me?" Gareth asked hopefully, a hopeful smile gracing his face. He began to feel very proud of himself, he believed that he had found a flaw in what Jenna thought was a perfect plan and that made him very pleased. Perhaps escaping would not be so difficult now.

"Ah yes, I remember now why I brought the dishcloth along," Jenna looked fondly at the dishcloth she held in her hands. She swung around to face Gareth and stepped towards him, smiling wickedly. "It's a nice dishcloth, isn't it? I particularly like the blue and white check pattern."

"Wh-what are you going to do with that?" Gareth blurted out. "You're not going to kill me with it, are y-MMMF!" He promptly found out why Jenna had brought along the dishcloth as she balled it up and crammed it fully into his mouth. Jenna cackled maniacally then turned around and ran off, vaulting over the fence and disappearing.

'Fantastic,' Gareth thought mournfully, looking up into the sky. 'I'm tied to a tree with some filthy cloth in my mouth that I can't even spit out and Felix is so going to kill me when Kay tells him about me wanting to marry Jenna. I hope I die of starvation first or something... I so don't want to see what Felix's capable of... I'm scared...'

Kay stepped into the kitchen and looked around disbelievingly. The kitchen was dirty, the table only half wiped. The worst thing was that Gareth was actually not in the kitchen... she immediately suspected that he had dared to skive off his chores and he probably hoped that she would not find out as well. Kay's mouth curved into a wicked smile and then she burst into cruel, maniacal laughter, even crueller and more maniacal than Jenna's laugh.

Upstairs, Aaron was reading in his bedroom. The book fell to the floor as Aaron screamed and scrambled underneath his bed, frightened almost to death by the sound of his sister's cruel laughter. It made him feel scared that blood might be spilled tonight, he had a very bad feeling all of a sudden. When Kay laughed like that, it usually meant that someone was going to get hurt.

Kay promptly marched out of the kitchen, her mind set on seeking out a certain brownhaired Venus Adept. She felt the need to... talk to him about certain matters which may be of his concern. Hopefully, she thought, it might involve someone getting hurt. Particularly Gareth. For not doing his chores as he should be. He had full well known the consequences of shirking his duties and if he chose to do so, then fine. His loss.

His funeral.

Kay's smile widened and her eyes gleamed red as she activated her automatic homing device, making a beeline for Felix who would surely be nearby.

Nearby, Jenna was watching but she did not follow, she instead decided to worry very much for her boyfriend despite the fact that she had tied him to a tree and stopped him from doing chores. Jenna sighed and threw a fireball at the flowerbed, before realising what she had done and then she ran screaming, hoping there were no witnesses. It would be bad enough if Kay unleashed her wrath on Gareth, but Jenna simply did not want it on her. She had seen Kay as she walked out of the house... and it terrified her.

But of course Jenna would never admit that to anybody. Not even Gareth. Unless he admitted it first.

"Okay, I'm done with the list!" Mia exclaimed, jumping to her feet. Alex squealed in delight and started hopping up and down like a lovesick puppy who had sighted a bone and wanted it very badly. Isaac almost vomited but he managed to hold it in, he was worried he might gross Mia out even if he carefully aimed it at a certain Mercury Adept... the same one who was trying to steal his girlfriend.

"Yay!" Alex clapped his hands in delight, his eyes turning into big red hearts. "Quickly, give me the list!"

"Better do as he says," Isaac whispered to Mia. "Might have a heart attack if you don't... actually, don't!"

"Here you go," Mia thrust the list into Alex's hands and stepped back, watching him expectantly. "And you've got to do all of them."

"Number one, fix Kraden's roof?" Alex nodded and stuffed the list into his pocket, patting it protectively. "I shall do that."

"NOW!" Mia ordered. Alex immediately rushed off, squeaking in joy. "The nerve of that guy..."

"Fix Kraden's roof?" Isaac looked wonderingly at her.

"Yeah, I don't want Kraden roping you into it," Mia answered matter-of-factly. "It might hold the old man at bay a while as well."

"Good..." Isaac was relieved. "Um, what else was on the list?"

"Well... there was teaching a purple camel to talk," Mia held up her hands and counted off her fingers. "Getting two polka-dotted penguins to have a little giraffe baby, getting blood out of a stone, bury self in the snow and stay there for five years without leaving, going to Alhafa and calling the mayor rude names until he gets thrown in jail, licking his elbow, staring into the sun for ten minutes without flinching, oh, and jumping down Gaia Falls."

"Mia, you are truly a legend!" Isaac was awed. "You are so clever and beautiful and intelligent..."

"Now with any luck, we'll never see him again, because he'll freeze to death or be trampled by a camel or have his eyes pecked out by penguins or at least be blinded!" Mia grinned wickedly. "And if he ever does come back, I'll just let Serac get him over and over until he runs off crying or something."

"You think he really will do everything on the list?" Isaac wondered.

"Of course!" Mia exclaimed laughingly. "He's Alex!"

Ivan suddenly gasped and clutched his forehead, falling to his knees and looking horrified.

"Ivan?" Sheba glanced at the stricken Jupiter Adept. "What are you playing at now?" First he had fainted, then he had woken up and shouted some gibberish before remembering where he was, and now he was acting stupid. She was beginning to get quite tired of his erratic behaviour.

"I... had a vision..." Ivan shuddered. "I saw blood... being spilt..."

"Blood?" Sheba frowned. "Really?"

"Yeah..." Ivan nodded, trying to recall the vision. "A brunette... a redhead..."

"A fight?" Sheba went pale. "Between a redhead and a brunette?"

"Yeah..." Ivan cringed. "The... blood..."

"Who won?" Sheba asked after a short pause.

"The brunette," Ivan answered.

"Then I feel very sorry for the redhead," Sheba clasped her hands together in silent prayer.

Picard watched on, sweatdropping, as two of his fangirls got into a slapping fight, a girl with brown hair and a girl with red hair. For a short while, it looked like neither side was winning until the brunette changed her tactics and smacked the redhead in the nose, giving her a pretty red nosebleed. The redhead screamed, declared that she loved Picard more than her rival did, and stormed off, wiping her bleeding nose.

And thus, the blood that Ivan had envisioned had been spilt.

"Psychos," Felix commented, staring at the brunette as she yelled vulgar words at the redhead's back, unable to think up a better comeback. "You really are dangerous, Picard, girls are killing each other over you."

"A nosebleed wouldn't kill anybody," Picard sighed, as a fangirl blew a kiss at him and swooned to the ground. "Fainting off a cliff might... but I don't think that these girls are that stupid. Obviously, you've already called them stupid."

"Yeah, well... maybe they are!" Felix exclaimed, turning away and frowning as Kay came walking towards him, a demonic smile on her face. "Picard, I'm scared."

"It's only Kay," Picard brushed it off casually, unaffected by the glowing red eyes and the wicked smile. "There's nothing to be scared of."

"Then you obviously don't know Gareth's sister very well..." Felix braced himself for whatever she was about to say, hopefully she wasn't planning on shouting at him, it wasn't like he had done anything. Automatically, he started trying

to recall if he had ever damaged any of Kay's flowers but he could not really remember doing so, so maybe he was safe for now.

At least, he hoped so.

Feizhi was bored again. The escorts were already black and blue so she couldn't practice any more of her karate, chi, whatever she called it this time. Her escorts were desperately peppering her with suggestions, including taking a walk or flower picking, but Feizhi simply was not interested in those sort of things. She sat on a chair, her elbows propped on a desk, deep in thought and ignoring the escorts who were talking away at a high speed.

And then it came to her.

"I know what I shall do!" Feizhi exclaimed, pushing back her chair and sending several escorts flying, screaming as they flew. "I shall accomplish something today! I, Feizhi, will face my worst fear and I will triumph over my fear!"

Feizhi turned and casually marched off, pushing aside the anxious escorts who were now declaring that they wished for her to do no such thing. It wasn't as if they ever had an effect on her anyway, they were just there to be annoying, oh and be shields for her against monsters. The Vermin bites on their legs proved that fact.

Once Feizhi was outside the inn, she took a deep breath and willed herself to be strong as she started walking towards north.

It was quite obvious at that point.

Her worst fear was Kraden.

And she was doing something very stupid.

Feizhi was going to Kraden's cottage again. Even after last time when she had been nearly talked to death. But that was the whole point of facing your worst fear, wasn't it? Risking your life. Well, depending upon the fear anyway. People who were scared of flowers or inanimate objects wouldn't really be risking their life. Unless they tried to hug a Venus Flytrap.

***Chapter 15*: Chapter 15**

Love Bites

"Ah, Felix," Kay came to a standstill and smiled sinisterly. "How nice it is to see you."

"Actually, I was just going-" Felix began but Picard trod on his foot. "Ow! You jerk of a Lemurian! I'm going to-"

"I have important information concerning Gareth," Kay folded her arms across her chest, pretending not to notice Felix's eagerness to get away from her as quickly as possible.

"I already know he's a blockhead, thanks," Felix smiled hesitantly. Kay shook her head. "Oh, it's not that?"

"I read Gareth's diary a while ago," Kay began, speaking ultra calmly for one who was enraged by her brother slacking off chores. "Obviously he misspells a lot of words and his grammar is sometimes inadequate. Believe me, finding his diary was very easy, it was just a big book labelled 'Gareth's Diary' that he left lying around."

"And what sort of things does he write in there then?" Picard asked curiously, shuddering as he imagined Gareth drawing hentai doodles in the pages. Not such a pretty image.

"1 whinging about how he's hungry and loves food, 90 Jenna, 9 stuff like ranting about Kraden and battles and reminiscing on the journey," Kay answered. "He's like a lovesick puppy, it's absolutely disgusting."

"And you came to tell us this because?" Felix ventured, wondering why Kay would come to tell him and Picard all

about what was in Gareth's diary, it wasn't like he particularly wanted to know, or did he?

"Oh, because Gareth wrote a charming entry about how he was planning to propose to Jenna," Felix and Picard could have sworn that her eyes flared red in that instant and smoke poured out of her nose, but then next second she was back to normal. "Thought you might want to know." Then Kay turned and walked off, chuckling sinisterly, leaving the two lost for words.

"This is kinda nice, huh?" Mia snuggled up to Isaac in the crook of a tree, making sure that the readers got the desired amount of fluff. Squirrels were in the branches, watching the pair intently with their beady eyes. Nosey things, squirrels. "Almost all of us are together... you and me... Gareth and Jenna..."

"Hmm... hey, what about Sheba?" Isaac asked suddenly, glancing at Mia. "She and Ivan seem to be pretty close, do you think that there could be something there?"

"Isn't that for Ivan and Sheba to decide?" Mia asked curiously.

"Who says it is?" Isaac grinned wickedly, planting a kiss on her lips.

"Hmm..." Mia looked thoughtful. "Maybe we should try our hand at this thing called plotting..."

"Yeah, isn't plotting fun?" Isaac smiled. "For all we know, there's evil squirrels up in the tree branches plotting to rain acorns on us." He chuckled.

"Isaac, you're so funny," Mia laughed.

Then acorns started raining down on Isaac and Mia at a very fast rate and they decided that it was definitely not very funny as they took to running far from the evil squirrels and in the direction of Isaac's house. There was plotting to do and it had to be done now.

"Maybe we should get back to the plotting?" Ivan suggested in a bored tone.

"Nah, that started off the Adept War..." Sheba said, equally as bored. "Maybe we should play a prank on someone."

"And risk getting blasted with Psynergy?" Ivan winced. "Psynergy blasts are actually pretty painful."

"Come on," Sheba got to her feet and ran to the plaza, a speechless Ivan fast behind her.

Quite coincidentally or maybe not so coincidentally, somebody was approaching the gate. Sheba and Ivan reached the gate at the same time and stood on either side, trying to look very guardlike for two short Jupiter Adepts.

"Halt!" Sheba called out. "What is your reason for wishing to enter Vale?"

"Um, I travel," said the person hesitantly. "I need a place to stay."

"Unfortunately, Vale is not such a good place to stay," Ivan said as seriously as possible. "In the past three years we've had falling boulders, fierce storms, earthquakes, oh, and an erupting volcano. It is very lucky that we still have a populastion over one hundred!"

"I... see..." The traveller had now gone very pale and glanced fearfully up at Mt. Aleph as if expecting it to burst in a fierce

display of lava showers. "I am terribly sorry to disturb you, I may have to go elsewhere..."

"Try Lunpa to the east," Sheba advised, pointing in the direction of the thieves' town. "It is much safer than Vale and I am sure you will get a warm reception there."

"Thank you," The traveller smiled and set off, wincing under the weight of the bags he carried on his back.

"Sheba!" Ivan exclaimed, his eyes wide as saucers. "How could you say to go to Lunpa?"

"Oh come on!" Sheba protested airily. "I'm sure Lunpa is very nice. Besides, wasn't the bad Dodonpa dude locked up by his dad?"

"Well, yeah," Ivan nodded hesitantly. "But we're not even sure how much Lunpa has changed!"

"Well, the traveller won't be coming back here for sure," Sheba walked away. "Probably scared his head will get smashed in by a falling boulder by now."

"You say it like it's a regular occurrence," Ivan muttered, following her. "And I forgot to mention the steaming mad Mars Adepts who blow you up just for looking at them... oh, that's right, you're not supposed to talk freely about Adepts..."

"They would probably think an Adept was some weird animal or something," Sheba scoffed contemptuously. "That just goes to show how little they know."

"Yep," Ivan nodded.

"I'm not sure if Yepp was that bad," Sheba frowned. "He did go to Lemuria, didn't he?"

"Sheba," Ivan said warningly. "The Yepp jokes are very unfunny."

"How about the Sunshine one?" Sheba smirked. "Remember, the blacksmith in Yallam? I always wanted to stand outside his shop and sing "You Are My Sunshine" but Felix was scared that old Sunny would go psycho, pick up an axe and give chase. Where does he get his freaky ideas from?"

"WHO BURNT MY FLOWERS!"

Kay's scream rang out over the entire village, sending children scuttling to their homes and crying for their mommies, and several people screamed, believing that it was the Coming of the Apocalypse. Gareth heard the scream and shuddered violently, he was sure she was angry enough because he wasn't doing the chores, but somebody burnt her flowers?

'Please don't let her blame me, please don't let her blame me,' Gareth mentally begged, trying to loosen the ropes and failing miserably. 'I've got to find a way off this stupid tree fast, then I'll probably relocate to Tundaria or something, but then I'd need the ship and I don't know who has the Black Orb, and someone would probably come after me with the Teleport Lapis or something... I am so screwed. Maybe I should wear a paper bag over my head after all.'

Gareth closed his eyes shut and imagined that Dullahan and Deadbeard were marching towards him, and there was no escape. He was doomed. He was doomed. So doomed. They would have to erect a memorial statue in his honour. A smaller voice that lived in his mind insultingly inferred that the people of Vale might not want to remember him but he

hurriedly shut it out. Jenna would remember. Hopefully she would remember she had tied him to the tree. She only tied him because... she was impatient and it must be her time of the month or something. Yeah, that was it.

'I couldn't propose to her while tied to a tree anyway,' Gareth thought glumly. 'I'd rather the situation was romantic... and I can't even say anything with a dishcloth in my mouth... this tastes like...'

Jenna, who was hiding behind a tree, shivered and hoped fervently that Kay might burn the wrong Mars Adept. Not Gareth either. Speaking of Gareth, she hoped that he was ready to tell her but perhaps she should wait a while. Unless someone found him first, but what were the chances of that? Few people even went to Kraden's cottage, let alone past it, or even over the fence. That meant it was her responsibility to make sure Gareth didn't starve to death.

'On second thoughts, he might have already,' thought Jenna glumly, setting off at a brisk walk to get as much distance between her and Gareth's house as quickly as possible before Kay went on the warpath. 'He starves like every ten seconds. It's so frustrating.'

Feizhi approached Kraden's cottage, shivering a little. She was trying to be as brave as she possibly could but that didn't stop her from shaking all over like a jelly obviously. She was surprised to see a person on the 'roof' or what there was of it anyway, levitating up with wood and putting thatch over the wood. Of course, it had been roofless before, so it was likely someone would fix it. Feizhi squinted at the person with the long blue hair, trying to figure out if it was a man or a woman.

"Excuse me," Feizhi called out. "Are you a man?" She could be fairly blunt at times but she just wanted to be sure. Perhaps it was obvious really, as far as she knew women didn't usually fix the roof so how could it be?

"I'm getting really sick of these stupid gender cracks that everybody seems to be making about me which are completely biased, stupid, rude and unfair and I do wish that people would quit making them because they are extremely unfunny!" Alex shouted down. "And I do not want people disrupting me from my sacred work that I must do at all costs, this is the only way that I can win back my beloved Mia into my arms so that she will admit her affection for me and we can be together forever. She was sadly, most tragically taken from me by that asinine jerk, the one who goes by the name of Isaac... that..." A stream of expletives followed.

"How dare you say such things about Isaac!" Feizhi exclaimed passionately. "He is a charming, wonderful man who does things for the good of others, he is noble and handsome and at least he doesn't look like a girl! That Mia must be a very wise girl to have picked him rather than some stupid man like you who can't even see the good qualities that Isaac possesses!"

"Well, you are a blinkered fool," Alex crossly slammed some thatch on the roof. "Isaac is a greedy man, he stole the power that I wanted, I wanted to be immortal and omnipowerful but no, the wicked Wise One, protector of this stupid village, had to give it to Isaac so that makes Isaac a thief and he also stole my woman so he is a very wicked thief and I intend to win Mia back sometime, I know that she loves me really, she is the light that guides my way, shining to me in the darkness, giving me a reason to live, I only wish to be with her for eternity and I know she would love me had

I something to give her, or something to make her proud of me, such as the power of Alchemy itself. What a great power."

"I... see..." Feizhi swallowed nervously. 'Oh fantastic! Now I'm having a conversation with a megalomaniac who hates my dear Isaac! Maybe I really should not have bothered coming up at all... I can't believe someone could hate Isaac!'

"Whatever is happening out here?" Kraden walked out of the cottage and looked up at Alex. "Harumph! Are you not even done yet? I demand that you hurry up, I do believe that the consistency of clouds in the sky means that it will rain very soon and I would rather that my precious books did not get wet, a lifetime's work could be ruined and if you don't hurry, I shall notify the others."

"Excuse me," Feizhi approached and the old man turned his attention to her. "Why is there a megalomaniac fixing your roof? And is it just me or does he talk more than even you do?" She had not witnessed the horror of the encounter in Champa where Alex had talked nonstop to Felix, Jenna, Sheba, Picard and Kraden and had actually managed the once thought impossible task of outtalking Kraden.

"Well, this megalomaniac, you see," Kraden cleared his throat and lowered his voice so that Alex would not hear. "He is blinded by his affection for Mia. However, Mia is a good girl and she sees how bad he truly is, so she blackmailed him into doing a list of tasks, many of them impossible. She was very nice, she made the first one fixing my roof although I suspect it was so I wouldn't have to make Isaac and the others do it but of course I'm not complaining."

"I see," Feizhi nodded. "Well, I can understand why Mia wouldn't like that guy, he's a complete jerk! How can

anybody not like Isaac? I think he must have been dropped on his head as a baby or something, he has some serious problems and I think he could do with therapy or something. Does he plan to get lost after this?"

"Hopefully, yes," Kraden glanced up at the bluehaired man. "I scarcely believe it... that megalomaniac, Alex, the ONLY one who is capable of outtalking a rambling old man like me and people often accuse me of talking too much, even sleeping through my lectures even though I work so hard on them and it is a terrible shame that they ignore me like that, what can I do but talk? I'm not useful for much else..."

"Whoah..." Feizhi stared in fascination at the only person who was capable of outtalking Kraden. "He's going to go down in history alright..." She sensed several people wishing that he was history, but she brushed the feeling off and wondered what to do next. She had faced her worst fear by going to Kraden's cottage and talking to Kraden, and had actually found something worse in the process.

"... and we'll probably have a party..." Kraden had of course started rambling again.

"Huh?" Feizhi blinked. "When?"

"When he leaves of course. Why else would we have a party, we've had little occasion to lately."

"Oh."

***Chapter 16*: Chapter 16**

Love Bites

'What am I going to do?' Gareth struggled against the ropes again, not caring that he had not yet managed to loosen them even a nanometre. The dishcloth was beginning to taste like old socks and he was getting hungry, at this rate he might swallow the dishcloth. At least then he could shout for help if he wasn't choking to death by then. Gareth sighed and glanced down at the rope. It was tied tightly, binding his arms to him, just above his hands.

And then an idea struck Gareth sharply on the head, so sharply that he was dumbstruck at the idiocy of not having thought of it before. He would have grinned had he not had a dishcloth in his mouth. His hands flared up with Fire Psynergy as he slowly burnt away the rope. It came away swiftly and fell to the ground, releasing Gareth. Gareth was so relieved that he fell face down into the ground. The now free Mars Adept pulled the dishcloth out of his mouth and whooped, getting to his feet and running away from the cruel tree he felt he had nearly starved to death on.

"I'M FREE!" Gareth cheered, running past Kraden's cottage. He paused and glanced at the people giving him weird looks. Feizhi was in the process of walking away and she quickened her pace, deciding that he was surely insane and pitying Isaac for having a friend like him. Kraden went back to watching Alex fix the roof and Gareth grinned smugly. He liked to see Alex roped into chores, so he promptly pointed at the longhaired Mercurian and started laughing. "HA HA HA HA!"

"I refuse to listen to idiot Mars Adepts who have nothing better to do than point at people and laugh like idiots," said Alex obstinately, adding a few more piles of thatch. "It is clear that they have nothing better to do and it is a pitiful waste of their life to do such a stupid thing, he will obviously get nowhere in life if all he does is laugh at people, which really is such a stupid waste of time and he needs something better to do so that he actually stood a chance of getting somewhere in life, not pointing at people and laughing."

"I refuse to listen to stupid Mercury Adepts who have nothing better to do than repeat what they say," said Gareth smugly, turning and running off in the direction of his house, ignoring the curses Alex threw at his back. With any luck, Kay might not have found out that Gareth had been absent and he might be able to complete his chores. If only that was possible. Then he would be safe!

Gareth nervously tiptoed into the kitchen, closing the door behind him, and glanced at the table. To his horror it was completely wiped which meant that somebody else had done the chores for him. He really hoped it had not been Kay... maybe it had been somebody who would not tell Kay... yet, the house was quiet... too quiet for a house where seven people lived. Gareth swallowed nervously and passed through the kitchen, into the living room which was also deserted.

Deciding he was safe, Gareth went back into the kitchen-

And screamed.

"What... did... she... say?" Felix said finally once he had rediscovered his ability to speak. Okay, so maybe he hadn't been that shocked since he had been suspecting it might happen, but he was still shocked because he hadn't been

expecting it so soon. A doofus as his brother in law? What a nightmare. "Did she say what I think she said?"

"If you think she said Gareth was planning to propose to Jenna," Picard paused for suspense. "Then yes, that's what you heard and I heard also. Kay certainly is not a very nice girl is she? I'm sure glad I never got landed with siblings."

"My worst nightmare is coming true," Felix winced, looking so pitiful that somebody might actually almost feel sorry for him. "That doofus idiot is going to propose to my sister! It's far too early! It's a nightmare!"

"Not so loud, Felix," Picard warned the Venus Adept quickly. "Jenna's coming this way." Felix immediately shut up. He wasn't stupid enough to tell her that Gareth was going to propose, that was Gareth's job, not his.

"What's up with you two?" Jenna came to a stop in front of the two, looking at them suspiciously. Felix looked a little bit too pale and Picard looked somewhat amused frighteningly enough. Jenna wondered if Picard was being sadistic or something. "What's with the sudden silence?"

"Um... seen Gareth lately?" Felix asked weakly. "I wanted to talk to him about something."

"He's... tied to a tree," Jenna answered with a big smile on her face. "With a dishcloth in his mouth." The female Mars Adept turned and walked into her house, humming a happy, upbeat tune as if tying her boyfriend to a tree and stuffing a dishcloth in his mouth was completely normal and something to be proud of.

"Tied to a tree..." Picard shook his head wearily, fearing for Jenna's sanity. "Jenna tied Gareth to a tree?"

"Which tree?" Felix wondered immediately. "I'm going to go and look for him."

"Surprise, surprise," Picard muttered as the dark haired Venus Adept set off to look for Garet. "Why didn't I see that one coming?"

"So, what should we do?" Mia sat at the table with Isaac on the opposite end and facing her. She glanced at the materials Isaac had produced, some sheets of paper and a couple of pens to use. "We're going to write? What good will that be?"

"It's simple," Isaac smiled. "We need to fix Ivan and Sheba up, but they won't do it if we simply ask, so I think we should try... tricking them into it somehow."

"Trickery?" Mia raised an eyebrow, surprised at Isaac's suggestion. It was a bit unlike him to do that sort of thing, even in plotting which they had not really done much of lately. "You sure about that?"

"Don't worry, Mia, nobody will be hurt by this, emotionally or physically," Isaac assured her. "Well, I'm not too sure about physically, who knows whether Ivan and Sheba secretly have psychotic fans in hiding who will beat up either of them for getting with the other or not?"

"Hope not," Mia grabbed a pen and smirked. "So, what do we do?"

"I think a nice meeting at night under the stars would be a good one," Isaac said quickly, a dreamy look in his eyes. "So we need to get Ivan and Sheba together in that kind of situation, make them think the other wants to see them there. You write a note from Sheba to Ivan, I'll do Ivan to Sheba."

"Isaac..." Mia's jaw dropped open. "You're amazing, seriously... I never took you to be the type of person to do that..."

"Heh," Isaac sweatdropped. "After all that plotting Gareth and Jenna and Ivan and Sheba did, I thought we should try our best to upstage them-"

"So let's do it!" Mia exclaimed, quickly grabbing a sheet of paper and starting to write. Isaac proceeded to do so as well.

Somewhere else, Sheba wondered why she had a very bad feeling that someone was plotting and it was to do with her yet it didn't seem to be plotting against her.

Gareth shrank against the wall as his worst nightmare came stalking towards him in the kitchen, shrouded in utter darkness, eyes gleaming bright red and accompanied with a malicious smile, long snaking tentacles protruding from that twisted skull, a forked tongue running over the pointed fangs, claws rising to strike at him, a long snaking tail thrashing against the floor and causing cracks. It snickered and prepared to strike him down.

"Gareth? GARET! Wake up, you doofus!"

Gareth winced as water was thrown in his face and sleepily awoke to find himself on the kitchen floor. He realised that he must have fainted, oh, and Kay was standing above him, looking very mad and threatening with a bucket in her hands.

"Ugh... I'm wet..." Gareth complained, scrambling to his feet. "Um... the chores..."

"You didn't finish, did you?" Kay sneered, dropping the bucket which clattered on the floor. "You shirked your duties

so you had to be punished. Remember the deal? If you didn't do a full week of chores, I would tell Felix that you were plotting to propose to Jenna."

"You didn't..." Gareth paled, his eyes widening. If she had told Felix, then who knew what Felix was doing right now? He might even be making a Gareth voodoo doll and sticking pins into it. Or maybe he was going to.

"Of course I did," Kay started cackling insanely, like someone who had way too much sugar.
"Bwahahahahaha..."

"Um, Sis?" Aaron appeared in the doorway, looking very tired. "Please could you stop laughing like that, you sound like a donkey with toothache..."

"Bye!" Gareth hurriedly took the distraction as his chance to escape and fled out of the kitchen, slamming the door behind him and running for dear life while Kay proceeded to inflict her wrath on her youngest brother.

"Well, well, well," Ivan almost collided with the scared Mars Adept. "What's this? Gareth running for his life?"

"Yeah, maybe I am," Gareth sweatdropped. "Why aren't you with Sheba?"

"Sheba and I are not joined at the hip," Ivan said calmly. "Though it may seem that way sometimes to some of the more ignorant people, like you perhaps. So what is the reason for dear Gareth to be running like mad on a fine day like this?"

"My life is in danger!" Gareth croaked out hoarsely. "Felix is after me because he knows that I want to marry Jenna!"

"Ohhhh dear," Ivan tutted, pretending to be sympathetic. "That is a terrible shame. However..." A wicked glint came into his eyes. "I can help you!"

"Really?" Gareth fell to his knees and clasped his hands together. "How?"

"I will be your bodyguard," said Ivan dramatically, his cloak flapping behind him. "On one condition!"

"What?" Gareth asked, starting to get a little tired of conditions.

"Be my slave!" Ivan commanded.

"Uh..." Gareth considered the options. He could let Felix kill him (which he merely assumed would happen) or he could let Ivan protect him. "Okay!"

"Deal?" Ivan held his hand out.

"Deal." Gareth shook his hand. He was now Ivan's slave and Ivan would make sure that Gareth did whatever he asked.

Isaac quietly crept into Ivan's room, commando style. He had encountered Kay and made an excuse about Gareth having borrowed one of his books and not having given it back. Fortunately, Isaac survived the encounter and was now in the Jupiter Adept's room. He hurriedly rushed over to the bed and placed the note on the bedside table. It was fortunate that Ivan had not been in his room, otherwise the entire plan might have been ruined. Isaac went into Gareth's room and stole one of his books for good measure, Kay might be suspicious if Isaac left the house without a book.

Mia went all the way to Jenna's house, looking out for Ivan or Sheba, and sighing in relief as she reached the house

without encountering either of them. The room was not empty however as Jenna was in there, beating up a stuffed animal for reasons which Mia simply did not want to know.

"Hi, Jenna," Mia casually flipped the piece of paper onto Sheba's bed, trying to look very innocent. "What's up?"

"I-HATE-KAY!" Jenna yelled furiously. "SHE-BLACKMAILED-MY-BOYFRIEND-AND-HE-WON'T-TELL-ME-WHY! GAAAAHHHH!"

"I see," Mia said nervously, backing out of the room before Jenna blew something up. "Well, nice seeing you!" She hurriedly disappeared.

"What was that all about?" Jenna wondered, dropping the animal to the floor. "That was weird..."

Mia and Isaac reunited outside to let each other know how successfully their separate missions had gone and they performed a triumphant high-five, before embracing and acting in the way lovesick couples generally do for the benefit of Mudshippers around. Now they would just have to hope the rest of the plan went smoothly and the Jupiter Adepts did not suss them out.

***Chapter 17*: Chapter 17**

Love Bites

"Sit!" Ivan shouted, trying to look very scary for a short Jupiter Adept.

Garet perplexedly did so, falling to his knees and looking weirdly up at Ivan. Surely being a slave didn't mean that he had to be treated like a dog? Well, it was either that or no bodyguard to protect him from insane Venus Adepts. At least he suspected Felix might be insane after hearing the news. Then Garet realised how stupid it was to be scared of somebody who might be his brother-in-law. Might be. If he ever got the chance of propose to Jenna and she accepted.

"Beg!" Ivan was clearly enjoying this, being able to tell Garet what to do and get away with it. This was his chance to make the Mars Adept look like a complete fool, treating him like some common pet dog. It was very fun and Ivan hoped he would be able to do it for a very long time.

Garet frowned, raising his hands in the air and trying to do his best at looking like a begging dog. He was sorely tempted to just throw Ivan about with a Pyroclasm, he knew Ivan was making a fool of him. At least there didn't seem to be anybody watching which was a relief.

"Roll!" Ivan demanded, looking condescendingly down at Garet and trying not to burst out in fits of riotous laughter.

"Why do I have to roll?" Garet asked, giving Ivan a very suspicious look. "You're tricking me, aren't you?"

"Well, I'm your bodyguard," Ivan shrugged. "You have to do what I tell you. Now be a good boy and roll over, or else I might just throw the towel in, go and find Felix and let him know where you are. I'm sure he really wants to talk to you right now. Roll!"

"I don't have to put up with this..." Gareth muttered, lying down on the ground and rolling over. "I could just give you a toasting, you know. You're going to pay for this afterwards, I mean it. It's not funny making me look like a fool."

"You are a fool, Gareth," Ivan tutted. "Now go and jump in the river!"

"What? No way!" Gareth exclaimed, looking ashen. "I can't swim!"

"Ah, that's a pity. I had forgotten..." Ivan shook his head and threw his arms up in the air. "Well, jumping into the river's out of the question so... I know, I'll buy a bag of sweets and I can make you do tricks with them. How does that sound?"

"That sounds lousy," Gareth got to his feet and brushed off his dirty trousers. "I must be the most horribly treated slave in the whole of Weyard..."

"Well, life's tough," Ivan smirked. "Just got to put up with the ups and downs of life."

Felix knelt down in front of the tree and scooped up the rope and dishcloth. He quickly figured out that these must have been the articles Jenna used to hold Gareth prisoner but it seemed Gareth actually used his brain for once and used his Psynergy to get himself out. Felix was shocked that Gareth could possibly have remembered to do such a thing, he bet it must have taken Gareth a while.

'Well, if he's not here, there's no use in being here,' Felix dropped the rope and dishcloth and set off towards Kraden's cottage. 'Kraden may have seen him, so I'll ask him. I won't bother to ask the whiney moron that's fixing the roof, all he does is go on and on about Mia. It's sickening!'

"Whoop! Yay! Yahoo!" Alex was shouting, doing a jig on Kraden's roof. "I've actually finished the first task! Now... what was next on the list? Maybe I could jump off Gaia Falls next... anything to win Mia's heart! I must do everything on that sacred list! My precious!"

Felix was scared by the sight of Alex dancing on Kraden's roof and also perturbed at the thought of Alex being willing to jump off Gaia Falls. Sure, he could warp and levitate... as the Mercurian had just demonstrated by warping off the roof... but still, jumping off Gaia Falls did sound pretty foolish. Shaking his head, Felix approached the front door and pushed it open.

"Kraden?" Felix called. "Are you in there?"

"Ah, Felix!" Kraden appeared seemingly out of nowhere and made the Venus Adept jump. "Have you come to listen to one of my lectures? Is that Alex almost finished yet, I'm sick of listening to his incessant whining."

"Er, yes, he's gone," Felix managed a forced smile. "I don't want to listen to a lecture today, thank you, maybe another time..." 'More like a hundred years...' he thought sourly, remembering how badly the last one had gone. "Um, have you seen Gareth around?"

"Why, yes, I did happen to see Gareth passing by a while ago," Kraden paused. "He took great joy in taunting Alex, I am very proud of Gareth, he has surely grown somewhat in the intelligence stakes if he knows who to pick on. It seems

like only yesterday he was setting hedges on fire by accident because he couldn't control his Psynergy..."

"Did you see where he went?" Felix interrupted. It wasn't that he didn't enjoy listening to Kraden's stories (Okay, maybe he didn't really) but he really was in a bit of a rush. Who knew where Gareth was, what he was up to now. "I'm in a bit of a hurry."

"You young ones are always in a hurry nowadays!" Kraden harrumphed. "Why, back in my day, we learned how to take our time and not to rush everything, we would process everything at a slow, leisurely pace and if something could not be done in a day, it would be continued the next day. What is with you lot running around helter-skelter, I can barely keep track of you lot!"

"I don't know..." Felix grinned nervously, backing out of Kraden's cottage at a speedy rate. "I've... got to do something... uh, bye, Kraden!" He hurriedly turned and ran off before the old man could trap him and start lecturing him on something that was completely irrelevant and did not matter. He had to find Gareth after all.

"... and then this really big boulder came charging through the village and it smashed several houses in..." Sheba was currently telling her scary version of the storm that took place just over three years ago, using the accounts she had gained from certain Valeans to put her story together. "There were three people in the river too, and they were hanging onto wooden poles by their fingernails!"

"Whoah..." Feizhi trembled, going very pale at the thought of such a thing happening. "What happened then?"

"The boulder landed in the river and squished the three people hanging on!" Sheba exclaimed dramatically, a gust

of wind swirling around her. "They heard cracking, like bones! And then they never found the people who got hit by the boulder! And that wasn't it either... three years later, that mountain exploded and there was lava flowing everywhere, everybody had to run for their lives or be encased in lava forever!"

"So where did the lava go?" Feizhi asked sceptically. Sheba's tale was certainly out of this world. Mt. Aleph looked completely harmless, she just didn't believe it was capable of exploding and covering an entire village in lava.

"The Mercury Adepts all washed it away," Sheba said quickly, pleased that she had come up with such a quick lie. "It was probably a waste of time though."

"Wh-why?" Feizhi asked, appalled that Sheba said it was a waste of time.

"I heard that the village was going to sink," Sheba widened her eyes and tried to look perfectly innocent. "Vale, Mt. Aleph, all of it is going to disappear into the ground and if we don't get out, we're goners. But the problem is, nobody knows when it's going to happen so be very careful, okay? I'd hate to see you disappear into Weyard, moles and humans just don't mix, alright?"

"Moles?" Feizhi laughed nervously. "Yeah, okay, moles, right. There's an evil colony of moles that's going to... dig underneath and make Vale and Mt. Aleph sink? Sure, I got you, I understand perfectly. This sounds like a very dangerous place, are you happy living here?"

"Oh, yes!" Sheba nodded. "I'm perfectly safe... we Adepts are always trained for dangerous situations, but I'm not sure about you... even if you can see the future, you won't know when it will happen, do you?"

"No... no, I don't..." Feizhi trembled. "C-can you? See the future too, I mean?"

"Oh yes!" Sheba answered in a serious tone, trying to sound even more dramatic than before. "I see red rivers, forests being devoured in waves of orange fire, the earth being torn up and flung asunder, the wind tearing up everything in its path and leaving destruction in its wake! Do not belittle the power of the wind, it shall be the undoing of Weyard!"

"That's so sweet..." Feizhi lightly patted Sheba on the head, then turned around and walked off towards the inn, chuckling softly.

"Don't patronise me..." Sheba grumbled, walking away in the opposite direction and feeling utterly humiliated. She had nearly convinced Feizhi of pretty much everything, only to ham it up by being completely overdramatic. Never mind, she could compensate for it by flash frying a stray Mars Adept or something, it wasn't the end of the world. And she and Ivan had successfully tricked that traveller by the gate anyway. Okay, so they hadn't exactly tricked him, just made Vale's past sound worse than it was, if that was even possible.

"Found Gareth yet?" Picard asked as he found Felix walking around Vale, presumably looking for Gareth still. "By the look on your face, probably not."

"I swear he must be hiding from me!" Felix exclaimed.
"Maybe he's got some really guilty secret or something... I'll worm it out of him sooner or later, when I find him!
Whatever is he thinking? I know he's got a lack of brains, but marrying my sister? Already?"

"I think you just need to cool down a little..." Picard said cheerfully, clapping Felix on the back. "Fancy it?"

"Cool down?" Felix glared at him. "Whatever are you talking about-" He was suddenly drenched by Picard's psynergy.

"There you go," Picard smiled and walked away, whistling a tune.

"You're dead meat," Felix scowled, wringing out his wet hair. "That was a very unfunny pun too! Cool down? You're insane, nuts, completely crazy... I don't want to share my room with you anymore, maybe you should go and sleep in some creepy, dark place, in a coffin or something... oh well, better get back to looking for that idiot..." And with that, he set off to continue his search for Gareth.

"Do you think Ivan and Sheba really will fall for the notes thing?" Mia asked of her boyfriend in concern. "They might just spring us instantly and we'll be so busted, they might shock us or something."

"Don't worry about it, Mia," Isaac leaned in for another kiss. "Let's just continue to make the Mudshippers very happy."

"Sure, Isaac, sure," Mia kissed back. "But don't overdo it."

"It's possible to overdo it?" Isaac looked stunned. "What do you mean?"

"Well, if I..." Mia suddenly flashed into freaky fangirl mode, stars shining in her eyes, her hands clasped together and her mouth wide open. "Oh, I love you so much, sweetikins, snugglebunny, Isaac-poo! I want to be with you forever and ever, and our hearts will beat as one and all that mushy stuff we do!"

"Okay, Mia, okay..." Isaac chuckled. "You're beginning to scare me now, honestly."

"Maybe..." Mia slipped back into normal Mia mode. "What scares me is the thought of your Mom making more pancakes for us. What scares you, Isaac?"

"Hmm, fighting a fifty headed dragon on a lighthouse... alone... without you by my side..." Isaac shuddered and took Mia's hands in his. "Always be by my side, Mia, because I swear never to leave your side... well, unless you're going to the toilet or something."

"We'll be together always," Mia smiled. "I'll fight all the fifty headed dragons in the world by your side."

And then Isaac and Mia melted into yet another passionate kiss, caring not for the villagers who walked past and gave them weird looks as if they had never seen two people in a stable, loving relationship before. But then, some Valeans could be pretty weird. Like the Valean who eats a ton of food and makes holes in people's roofs, or the Valeans who like to be temporarily mute.

"This is so unfair..." Jenna muttered, watching the happy couple from her bedroom window. "I could be in a romantic, fluffy scene with Garet right now but I tied him to a tree and he's probably starving right now. Maybe I should have tied Kay to the tree instead, but she's the type of person who would roast me just for looking at her!" She shuddered, and then smacked her forehead as she realised how silly it was for a Mars Adept to be scared of being burnt by another Mars Adept.

***Chapter 18*: Chapter 18**

Love Bites

"Oh, Isaac..."

"Oh, Mia..."

"Oh, Isaac..."

"Oh, Mia..."

Isaac and Mia were currently engaging in the very boring activity of saying each other's name over and over because they had nothing better to do. And then they would kiss passionately, and repeat the whole process over and over again. They had no respect for people who might be sickened by their actions whatsoever.

However, they soon found their happy passionate moment disrupted by a particularly rude Lemurian, coming over from the direction of Kraden's cottage. Goodness knows why Picard went there, he must have been in a lapse of insanity. Nevertheless, he was not inclined to vomit at Isaac and Mia's actions.

"Isaac, Mia," Picard said urgently, breaking up the very passionate and repetitive moment and getting scathing glares as a response which he promptly ignored. "I just went over to Kraden's cottage-"

"Are you insane?" Isaac screeched, going pale at the thought of Picard being stupid enough to do such a thing. Perhaps he might actually have blown Kraden's roof off too,

if Alex had finished it yet. That was a horrifying thought.
"What did you do such a stupid thing for?"

"I wondered why he was singing very loudly," Picard shuddered, cowed by the memory of Kraden dancing and singing in front of his cottage. "Kraden singing is very scary indeed. Anyway, he was celebrating because Alex finished fixing the roof and has supposedly now left the village to do other tasks which hopefully won't be done very quickly at all."

"Yes!" Mia exclaimed, looking delighted to hear the incredible news. She could not have looked happier had she heard that a house had fallen on top of Alex... or maybe she could. "The wicked witch is gone! Now I don't have to worry about that whiny wretch popping up and declaring his undying devotion towards me which I really don't need to know about!"

"That's funny," Picard blinked, giving Mia a strange look. "Kraden was singing 'Ding Dong, the wicked witch is dead' and then you go and say nearly the same thing."

"Picard, please don't compare me to Kraden," Mia managed a strained smile, resisting the urge to hit him for doing such a thing. "I really don't like to be compared to such a crazy old man. Nobody does. Kraden is in a league of his own and nobody wants to be in such a place, that would make us outcasts. The only thing worse than Kraden is probably Alex..."

"Anyway," Picard continued, not really bothered to apologise for such a minor thing, since Mia could get worked up over the littlest things at times. "Kraden thinks we should have an all day long party tomorrow to celebrate Alex's leaving. What do you think about that?"

"I'm all for it!" Mia jumped to her feet and punched the air triumphantly. "A party to celebrate Alex leaving sounds very good! Isaac, what about you?"

"Fantastic," Isaac flashed a thumbs up, scrambling to his feet. "Let's spread the news!"

And then Isaac, Mia and Picard went off to do so.

"Party to celebrate Alex's leaving?" Jenna leaned on the windowsill, her window wide open. "That sounds excellent! But I'll have to make sure Gareth's off the tree by then if he isn't already, he won't want to miss such a great occasion." She closed the window and walked out of her room, leaving the house. She might as well help spread the news.

"Hmm..." Ivan rubbed his chin thoughtfully, looking at his victim, who was now sitting on the ground and giving him a frightened look. Perhaps it was the way Ivan kept looking at him, almost like a lion that had trapped a rabbit and was about to pounce. "I know, do a handstand."

"I can't do handstands," Gareth protested. "I'm sick of being your slave already! All you're doing is making me look stupid! I've been duped, you've tricked me! You're not going to get away with this!"

"Didn't you say that about Alex?" Ivan asked dryly, letting out a derisive chuckle.

"Yeah, well, so what?" Gareth growled. "I'm not doing your stupid tricks anymore, you aren't going to get away with it... I mean it! The stuff you did before, big deal, but this is a new low... AAAH!"

"What?" Ivan frowned as Gareth crawled backwards away from him, looking terrified. "I'm not that scary, am I?" A tap

on his shoulder alerted him to someone besides him and he turned around, yelping and taking a step back. "Oh, hi, Felix!"

"I need to talk to him please," Felix said as politely as he possibly could. "Step aside, midget."

"Who do you think you're calling midget?" Ivan tried to look very threatening, although it didn't really work. "I'm his bodyguard, so there."

"You make a lousy bodyguard," Felix cast Quake and Ivan stumbled, falling onto his backside.

"Argh!" Ivan crawled away and glared at Felix. "You could have warned me!" He stood up and just stayed there, watching the proceedings with interest.

"Hi, Gareth," Felix looked down at the Mars Adept, clearly amused at the way that he was acting. "You should know better than to take orders from a Jupiter Adept."

"Er... yeah... heh heh heh..." Gareth sweatdropped. "Yeah..."

"So, I hear you're planning to propose to Jenna?" Felix asked.

"Y-yeah..." Gareth cringed. "I guess Kay did tell you... at this rate, she'll probably tell Jenna too and it's going to be ruined! How can I propose to her if she already knows?"

"I doubt she knows yet," Felix blinked. "Well... I'm shocked that you're taking it so far so soon but I suppose you just don't like waiting, and neither does she really. But if you do anything out of order after marrying, then I swear I'll break every bone in your body."

"You mean you won't now?" Gareth's jaw dropped.

"Er... no?" Felix raised an eyebrow. "Seriously, Gareth, lay off the paranoia, it's making you look stupid... as if doing everything a midget said wasn't bad enough..."

"Yay!" Gareth jumped to his feet. "Hiring Ivan as my bodyguard was a waste of time then! I knew it!"

"I despair at the prospect of having a moron like you for my brother-in-law..." Felix moaned, turning away. "This is a nightmare. But I can't do anything."

"Huh..." Ivan scowled. "I liked having Gareth as a slave."

"I imagine it was fun," Sheba said from behind him, a mischevious grin on her face.

"AAAAH!" Ivan almost jumped out of his skin and he whipped around to face Sheba. He sighed in relief and placed a hand over his heart. "Sheba, you nearly gave me a heart attack!"

"You're too young for heart attacks," Sheba giggled. "The look on your face... it was priceless!"

"Gareth! You're off the tree!" Jenna exclaimed, approaching the group and looking extremely shocked. "I don't believe it! Who rescued you?"

"I got myself off," Gareth looked wounded. "I burnt the rope."

"So, are you going to tell me?" Jenna asked hopefully. "You've learnt your lesson now, haven't you?"

"Um... geez..." Gareth gulped. "Er... tonight! I'll tell you tonight!"

"Tonight?" Felix looked stunned.

"Yes, tonight!" Gareth said obstinately.

"Do you know what it is, Felix?" Jenna turned her evil gaze towards him.

"No, I don't," Felix quickly lied, stepping away from her and cringing under the evil gaze. "Just... um, be patient, please?"

"Fine..." Jenna said sulkily. "Tonight, Gareth, or you are dead."

"Heh..." Gareth chuckled nervously, rubbing the back of his head. "Sure."

"Good news!" Isaac hollered at the top of his voice, rushing towards everybody. "Excellent, amazing, great, wonderful, surprising, incredible, out-of-this-world, joyful news!"

"Spill," Ivan said immediately, curious to know what was so great.

"ALEX IS OUT OF VALE!" Mia squealed equally as loudly, almost inducing everybody to clap their hands over their ears before they got deafened by her exuberant shouting. "Alex finished fixing Kraden's roof and now he's left the village! We're free of the whinging drip!"

"And Kraden wants us to have an all day long party tomorrow to celebrate," Picard spoke up. "Since this is such a joyful occasion, it's only right to celebrate."

"We should remember this day and make it a calendar day too!" Jenna exclaimed. "We could call it... Alex's Departure Day, and on this day we burn Alex dolls on a bonfire and eat marshmallows and sing songs to celebrate! And it will be illegal not to celebrate it, anybody who doesn't will be hung, drawn, quartered, tarred and feathered!"

Everybody glanced at Jenna, sweatdropped and looked away, trying hard not to laugh from the incredulity of such an idea. Jenna fumed and then started shouting about how rude everybody was being, that they were not going to get away with being so rude like that. Gareth quickly shut her up with the usual method of sweeping her off her feet and kissing her, which fortunately worked.

Night fell and Ivan and Sheba went to their rooms. Sheba was perplexed to find the bedroom Jenna-free but she thought nothing of it, crossing the room to her bed. She was surprised to find a note and hurriedly picked it up, unfolding it and smoothing the creases, reading the neat script that was scribed onto the paper.

"Meet me on the southern bridge by the waterfall in front of the house where you're sleeping... Ivan..." Sheba studied it intently. It could be a hoax, but it could also be genuine so she might as well go. It wasn't that far to the bridge, so she wasn't going to complain or anything. Sheba slipped the note in her pocket and left the house, heading to the bridge.

Ivan was surprised to find a note on his bed as well. He was half expecting it to be another 'You smell of poo' note from Gareth, but surprisingly enough it wasn't. It was actually written in very nice handwriting too, unlike Gareth's messy, intelligible scrawls.

"Meet me on the southern bridge in front of Felix and Jenna's house... Sheba..." Ivan folded the note up and put it in his pocket, sitting on his bed and wondering what to do. "Well... it might be from Sheba, so I might as well go and see." He left his bedroom and exited the house, surprised to see Gareth outside ahead of him. 'Probably off to stop Jenna from murdering him or something...' Ivan shrugged and set off towards the bridge.

Jenna was already in the plaza, waiting for Garet. He had told her to meet him in the plaza tonight and she was feeling so impatient that she felt like running to his house and berating him, saying that he was late and she was going to wait no longer. The plaza was so boring at this time of night, there were only shops down here and hardly anybody about. There weren't even any scurrying mice for her to chase and burn to a crisp. She was unaware that she was not the only one down there, Felix and Picard were also hiding in the shadows, watching. Felix felt he needed to know the outcome of such an event and Picard just tagged along.

Isaac and Mia were also dabbling in the art of spying, but in a different area. They were currently stationed in some bushes near the bridge, waiting for Ivan and Sheba to be there, hoping that something good would come of the prospective event. Oh, and they were occasionally kissing passionately as well of course much like a happy couple does.

***Chapter 19*: Chapter 19**

Love Bites

"He's late... he's late..." Jenna muttered almost psychotically, marching up and down the length of the plaza, her eyes glowing red. "Garet's late, Garet's late... I'm going to kill him, I'm going to kill him painfully for being late... he probably used this as an excuse to prevent me from killing him..."

"Isn't talking to yourself supposed to be a sign of insanity or something?" Picard whispered to Felix, looking somewhat worried as he watched Jenna marching about and talking to herself incessantly, unaware she was being watched.

"She's going to crack..." Felix whimpered quietly, a look of paranoia in his eyes. "She's going to crack and we'll all be doomed... maybe we should start running for our lives about now before the entire plaza goes up in flames. Look at her eyes, they're glowing!"

"I'm sure that's just your imagination," Picard assured him, although he had a doubtful look on his face. "There's no way Jenna's about to crack and burn down the entire plaza. She looks a bit cross, sure, but it's only impatience. Jenna won't burn even a leaf..."

Suddenly, a nearby bush burst into flames courtesy of Jenna's Serpent Fume attack. Picard almost screamed in pure fear, but Felix quickly clamped a hand over his mouth and gave him a warning stare. Felix was pretty sure Jenna would burn them too once she realised they were spying on... no, just watching her... or waiting for Garet to get there

and learn if Jenn would accept the proposal. If Gareth ever did get there and live long enough to propose.

"G... g..." Jenna took a deep breath and let out a heartrending screech. "GARET! Where are you, you good-for-nothing, lazy, lying, wimpy oaf! When I find you, I'm going to beat you black and blue and make you cry! I'm sick and tired of waiting for you! Ugh... it's a good thing there's hardly anybody in the plaza, I wouldn't want to be punished for waking half the village or something..."

"Shut up!" A voice cut through the darkness and everybody looked up towards the inn, to see a woman leaning out of a window with a cross look on her face. She was evidently a guest, since Valeans didn't really stay at the inn. Isaac and Gareth were just exceptions. "We didn't ask for a nighttime show or anything, so take your stupid noise elsewhere!"

"Oh, go stick your head in an oven!" Jenna yelled, tempted to unleash a fireball and throw it at the woman. She might have done, had she not remembered several things. Psynergy should not be used on humans, especially non-Adepts, and it was not to be exposed to... well, most non-Adepts- certain Adepts had already broken this rule several times- and psynergy was not meant to be used for wrong deeds. Burning someone who made you mad probably was wrong.

"I'm impressed," Picard's jaw hung open in amazement. "Despite her intense rage at Gareth's tardiness, she can still restrain herself."

The woman opened and shut her mouth, looking like a goldfish, then she crossly drew back and slammed the window shut. Jenna scoffed and smirked, believing that she had indeed had the upper hand. And she probably had,

considering the woman had been so wimpy, she couldn't even bother with a comeback. Well, it served her right for daring to tell her, Jenna, to shut up anyway.

"I would have told the woman to go shove something up her..." Felix began, before catching sight of something that made him stop, his eyes widening in sheer astonishment. "He's finally here?"

"He didn't take that long," Picard protested as he watched Garet coming down the steps towards possible certain doom at the hands of the impatient Jenna. Picard sent a quick mental prayer towards the male Mars Adept, hoping that Fate wouldn't be too cruel to him, he really didn't want to have had wasted his time sitting out here in the dark with a paranoid Venus Adept when he could have been snug and warm in bed instead.

"Hey, Ivan's arrived!" Isaac hissed to his girlfriend, who had been absorbed in taking apart a leaf. She immediately dropped the shredded remnants of the leaf and they eagerly turned their full attention to the Jupiter Adepts standing on the bridge. Of course, Isaac and Mia didn't forget to hold each other's hands tightly as they absolutely had to be within physical contact every second since they fell in love.

"Hey, Ivan," Sheba greeted him, sitting on the rope that held the bridge firm and swinging her legs back and forth. "So, what did you want to see me about?"

"Huh?" Ivan squinted suspiciously at Sheba, his purple eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about? You're the one who gave me that note... shouldn't I be asking you?"

"Well, I got a note too," Sheba protested. "I thought you wanted to see me."

"Hmm..." Ivan started to slowly realise they had been duped. He let out a half-hearted sigh and shrugged sheepishly. "Guess we were duped but we're here now, so... maybe we'll talk for a bit or something. Hmm... it's very dark..." He glanced up into the sky and nodded. "As it should be."

"That's not the way to make conversation," Sheba shook her head and brushed back a lock of her blonde hair, looking up into the sky as well. "I can see stars. Did you know that making a wish upon the brightest star could make your wish come true? It usually works for me."

"Yeah, I've heard that too," Ivan smiled. "Lets make wishes together and see if they come true. I think that star's the brightest," He pointed in a random direction. "Ready?"

"Sure," Sheba nodded. "Ready as ever."

The Jupiter Adepts looked towards the brightest star and wished as hard as they could in silence yet making the wish together in unison, neither of them knowing the other had made the exact same wish.

' I wish I knew what he/she really thinks about me...'

A chill wind blew and the Wind Adepts shivered, glancing around as if trying to seek out the nature of that breeze. Evidently, it was just nature playing with them so they just chuckled and brushed it off. Silence reigned over the next few seconds as either Adept tried to think of what to say next, glancing around uncomfortably.

"Oh no, this doesn't look good..." Isaac murmured, looking anxious.

"Be patient, Isaac," Mia murmured into his ear. "This is just the beginning."

"Hello, Gareth," Jenna smiled sinisterly, placing her hands on her hips and tilting her head, her long wine coloured hair spilling over her shoulder. "I was starting to get rather tired of waiting for you to arrive. In fact, I was getting worried that you might not even turn up and I'd have to visit you."

"Hey, Jenna," Gareth was uncowed by Jenna's sinister look, quite used to her evil moods by now. "Of course I came, I told you I would."

"Tell me. Now!" Jenna demanded, folding her arms across her chest. "If you don't tell me, then I'll-"

"Burn him?" Felix muttered under his breath. "Despite the fact he's also a Mars Adept? It never works. I can't decide if it's a good thing or a bad thing either."

"Jenna, Jenna," Gareth smiled disarmingly, trying to soothe her raging temper. "Um, come with me, I want to show you something. I promise this is what you want to know, really and honestly!"

"Show me then," Jenna demanded. Gareth nodded and took her by the hand, leading her over to the pond near the Psynergy stone. The sparkling purple light fell upon the two of them and he was satisfied with the setting, her demands had hardly helped him to provide a romantic situation for the two of them. This was about as romantic as it was going to get but he couldn't really help it. It wasn't his fault his girlfriend was so homicidal.

"Here we go," Picard murmured, looking far more interested than he had in ages. "It's crunch time. Will a cranky, homicidal Jenna accept Gareth's proposal or club him over the head and throw him into the pond?"

"I think I'm going to hurl," Felix whispered. "I can't take the tension..."

"The excitement..." Picard added. "A truly monumental moment in the lives of two crazy Mars Adepts with furious tempers. Who do you think has the worst temper, Gareth or Jenna?"

"Probably Jenna..." Felix swallowed nervously. "She looks like she's about to bite Gareth's head off."

"Um..." Ivan hesitantly broke the silence, sitting next to Sheba on the rope and glancing at her. "I want to say something but..."

"But what?" Sheba asked softly, turning her head to look at him.

"I'm just not sure how to say it..." Ivan trailed off, biting his lip. "It's kind of hard... things like this... you don't know what to say, and the time matters too... timing's everything... and you don't know how the other will react..."

"Ivan..." Sheba placed her hand on top of his. "I think it's best to just... go with your instincts... say what you feel..."

"What about you?" Ivan met her emerald gaze. "Is there anything you want to say, that you feel that you can't quite say?"

"Well..." Sheba cleared her throat and nodded slightly. "Yes... but I've also heard that actions speak much louder than words. Maybe we should try that instead if we have such difficulty with words at the moment."

"Okay," Ivan brightened up a little. "We'll try that then."

Silence returned as Ivan and Sheba stared at each other, waiting for the other to make their move. Mia almost started squealing, but Isaac managed to stop her by kissing her, and they returned to watching, quietly gasping as the Jupiter Adepts leaned towards each other, their lips meeting. Sheba's hand tightened on top of Ivan's and Ivan lifted his thumb, stroking her hand with his, as they enjoyed this quiet, peaceful, supposedly unwatched moment where their feelings finally came to rise and their wishes came true.

"Jenna," Gareth took a deep breath and took Jenna's hands in his, clasping them together and looking straight into her eyes, trying to concentrate on what he had to say and not think too much about how beautiful her eyes were. "To me, you are the most beautiful woman in the village, the prettiest, loveliest..."

"Alright, don't pile it on," Jenna said grumpily, although she did not move from where she was, keeping level with Gareth's stare. "Are you about to apologise for something?"

"Please, hear me out," Gareth insisted. Jenna grudgingly quietened down, pursing her lips together. "I love you with all my heart, I am glad to have you by my side and I look forwards to us having many more years being happy together. Tonight, I am going to ask you a very big question..."

'It better not be "Can you forget about why Kay was blackmailing me?" because he's going to get badly hurt...' Jenna thought, waiting patiently for Gareth's question. To her surprise, Gareth let go of her hands and dropped to one knee, drawing out a little black box from the pocket of his trousers.

"Here we go..." Felix spoke, watching eagerly.

"About time," Picard smiled. "I think the ants are attacking me."

"Jenna of Vale," Gareth snapped open the box and displayed a slender, golden ring with a small jewel fixed into its surface. "I, Gareth, would like to ask you the honour of becoming my beloved, wedded wife. Will you?"

"I..." Jenna gasped, her hands flying to her mouth as she looked down at the ring. 'Oh wow! Gareth's just asked me to marry him? It was unexpected... but... oh wow! Wow times a hundred... I never guessed...' "I... wow... Gareth... uh... wow..."

"Yes or no," Felix struggled not to yawn. "Wow isn't an answer."

"I..." Jenna bit her lip, a veil of tears filming her eyes as she continued to look at the ring. "I don't think..." Gareth's jaw dropped open as he heard her first words of what could be a coherent sentence.

"What?" Felix sat forwards, his eyes widening in horror. "What's she doing?"

"If she's refusing, we've wasted our time sitting here," Picard looked dismayed. "But I can't think why..."

"Come on, Jenna," Felix whispered. "Don't break his heart."

"Ouch..." Picard looked anxious. "Surely she isn't refusing... surely not..."

"I don't think..."

'What's she saying?' Gareth began to look positively dismayed. 'She doesn't think she can marry me? I knew that this wasn't romantic enough! I've ruined it, she's gonna

dump me, she's going to kill me and throw me in the pond or something and even if she didn't, Felix would kill me for thinking I was worthy of marrying her, but wait, he didn't kill me before.. just what is Jenna trying to say? Doesn't she want to..."

"I don't think that I can refuse such a wonderful offer as that!" Jenna squealed in delight, jumping up and down on the spot. "YES! Yes, Garet, yes! YES!" Her screams of delight echoed throughout the plaza, sounding through most of Vale and rousing several people from their beds.

"What was that?" Mia wondered, frowning as she heard the screams.

"It's coming from the plaza!" Isaac leaped from the bush and started running. "Maybe somebody's being murdered!"

"Who shouts 'YES!' as they are being murdered?" Mia demanded, running after her boyfriend.

Ivan and Sheba broke off the kiss and watched Isaac and Mia running towards the plaza, both of them realising just who had written the notes. They immediately ran after Isaac and Mia to the plaza, both to confront the two of them, and maybe thank them, and find out the reason for all the screaming.

"Really?" Garet leaped to his feet, looking positively joyful. "Really and truly?"

"YES! Of course I'll marry you!" Jenna squealed, flinging her arms around his neck and almost choking him to death. Tears of joy were running down her cheeks as she sobbed her utmost joy into his shoulder. "I thought you'd never ask! I'm so glad!"

"What's happening?" Isaac demanded as he watched the two Mars Adept. Mia leaned on him, trying to catch her breath.

"Proposal," Felix walked out of his hiding place, along with Picard. "Went pretty well too."

"I think I've had a few hundred years of my life taken off," Picard wiped his brow. "Jenna really is a cruel trickster sometimes."

"Why's that?" Ivan asked.

"Well, a pause after 'I don't think' and before 'I can refuse' is pretty bad for the nerves," Felix explained.

"Ooh," Sheba chuckled. "I wish I could have seen the look on Gareth's face when she did that."

Everybody looked over at Gareth and Jenna who were still embracing happily. At long last, before everybody was about to fall asleep on their feet, the two finally let go and Gareth proceeded to put the ring on Jenna's finger. Thankfully, it fit perfectly. They turned and were somewhat surprised to see everybody else standing there, watching intently.

"What are you lot doing there?" Gareth looked confused. "I didn't know we were being watched..."

"Same goes for us," Ivan said meaningfully, shooting a stare at Isaac and Mia who blushed and stared sheepishly at the ground. "Good results though."

"We're getting married!" Jenna squealed, jumping up and down again. "I'm going to be Gareth's wife!" She screamed ecstatically, unable to contain her excitement at the prospect of finally marrying her boyfriend... no, fiance now.

Suddenly, everybody found themselves in a huge group hug and they all had their own little mini-party right in the plaza before several people started screaming abuse from the windows of the inn and the Adepts set off back to their houses, all of them deliriously happy or something similar.

"Felix, are you teary?" Picard squinted suspiciously at the Venus Adept as they walked to Felix's house, Jenna and Sheba walking ahead and talking excitedly to each other about the night's events.

"No!" Felix protested. "I'm just sad about having a doofus as a brother in law."

"Sure, Felix, whatever you say," Picard patted him on the shoulder. "I'm sure you're happy for them too, you just don't want to admit it."

"Shut up," Felix quickened his pace. "I'm tired."

"That went pretty well, didn't it?" Isaac smiled as he and Mia walked hand in hand to his house. "I really wasn't expecting it to go that well."

"Neither was I," Mia snuggled up to him. "I expected it to take longer than that. Ivan and Sheba just needed a nudge in the right direction... I'm glad it went so well... it could have backfired pretty badly upon us..."

"At least it didn't," Isaac pushed open his front door and closed it behind them. "Now we'd better get some rest before the party tomorrow. I'm sure it's going to be a party to remember."

"Yeah..." Mia kissed him on the lips. "Goodnight, Isaac."

"Night, Mia," Isaac kissed her back as they walked up the stairs. "Sweet dreams."

"You sure look happier than I've seen you in a long time," Ivan commented as he and Gareth walked to Gareth's house. "Hardly surprising, when Jenna accepted your proposal, I suppose. And all that fuss about it too!"

"I honestly hadn't planned to propose so soon," Gareth chuckled dryly. "It was a bit forced, but I'm glad she accepted. For a moment I thought she wouldn't..."

"I kissed Sheba tonight too," Ivan beamed. "She was right, actions really do speak louder than words. We finally got it out in the open... Isaac and Mia fixed us up, I'm glad they did. They were watching us from the bush."

"I think Felix and Picard must have watched me and Jenna," Gareth guessed. "Not that I would have known... I was too busy stopping Jenna from killing me... oh wow... she's going to be my wife, we're gonna marry..."

"Yes, I know," Ivan walked into his house and walked faster, getting away before Gareth exploded from sheer joy. "Goodnight and stuff... I'm exhausted!"

***Chapter 20*: Chapter 20 FINAL**

Love Bites

As the morning dawned over Weyard, the sky strangely enough being free of clouds despite the fact it had not rained for at least five days or so, eight Adepts slowly awoke at the crack of dawn, each of them trying to frantically remember what had happened last night and what they were doing today. It felt like they had partied like crazy last night, but the real partying was today, to celebrate the leaving of Alex.

'Huh... it wasn't a nightmare, was it?' Felix sat up and rubbed his eyes, yawning widely. 'It was real. Gareth proposed to Jenna. Gareth's going to be my brother in law. That's it, I'm going back to sleep, I still need to sleep this nightmare off...' He fell back onto his pillow and pulled the duvet over his head, pleading for sleep to claim him once more. All hopes of being able to get back to sleep were dashed out of the window when liquid yellow sunshine poured down on him, which had resulted from Picard opening the curtains.

"Wake up, sleepyhead!" Picard looked unnaturally cheerful for one who had gotten up at the crack of dawn. "Don't you remember what today is? We're partying to celebrate, er, Alex's Departure Day... which was yesterday of course. We've got to put decorations up and everything, and we're going to party like mad down in the plaza."

"Decorations?" Felix bolted upright, his eyes wide. "What the elements do we need decorations for? What kind of decorations?"

"Oh, balloons and things like that," Picard replied. "What did you think? What kind of a party would it be without balloons?"

"But I'm allergic to balloons!" Felix said desperately, hoping that the Lemurian might actually believe his desperate lie, which he had to admit did not sound particularly convincing. "I get all red and puffy and I can't breathe!"

"Nice try, Felix," Picard smiled. "Be down at the plaza soon, we'll need plenty of people to get the decorations up quickly." He turned and left the bedroom and a quietly cursing Felix, who threw the pillow at the window and fervently wished it was cloudy again. For a fleeting moment, Felix considered just closing the curtains and slipping back into bed anyway.

"EEEE!"

Or perhaps not. Felix sighed and slipped out of bed, grabbing a pile of clothes.

"Eeeeeee!" Jenna was acting extremely hyper, jumping around the bedroom and screaming at the top of her lungs. Sheba was staring in annoyance at her from underneath her duvet, having been woken up by Jenna's fervent screeching. "I'm going to get married to Gareth! He proposed to me last night! I'm his fiancée! He's my fiancé! We'll be husband and wife one day! We'll get married!"

"Um, Jenna?" Sheba spoke up. Jenna actually quietened down and turned to look at her wonderingly. "Now, I don't mind you celebrating the fact that Gareth proposed to you, but could you celebrate a bit more quietly in future? Hey... celebration... that reminds me of something... celebration? It can't be me and Ivan kissing, that's not worth celebrating, and it was before that... um..."

"Oh! Alex's Departure Day!" Jenna exclaimed, screeching again in joy. "That's right! Alex left the village yesterday and Kraden said we should party and so we're going to party all day long in the plaza, and we'll probably have to string up balloons and stuff because Kraden will want decorations or something... maybe a freak storm will come and take the balloons away... on second thoughts, a storm's not a good idea. Especially not if you have a giant boulder sitting on the mountain above your village. Never live next to a mountain with a huge boulder sitting on it."

"I see," Sheba reluctantly got out of bed. "I suppose Kraden wants us all involved because he's annoying like that. He better not talk all day because the party's going to end in tears if he does so. Either our tears of sheer boredom or Alex comes back to find we're celebrating his departure and he cries like a baby. Apparently, he didn't waste his breath saying goodbye to Mia. I'm surprised at that."

"If Alex came back, that would ruin the party!" Jenna exclaimed. "Oh never mind, he's probably too busy doing something on that list like making a cow paint its own blobs blue or something. I never knew he was that gullible. He was always the girly one of the group before he left us, preening his hair and such."

"And if you dared to touch a strand of his hair without permission, you immediately became his sworn mortal enemy," Sheba grinned wickedly. "And he would cry for hours, mourning over his poor violated hair and muttering death threats towards the person who dared touch it."

The two girls immediately processed to laugh maniacally before getting dressed and setting off to go to the plaza, along with a very grumpy Felix and a very cheery Picard. Oh, and a bag of balloons that were not yet blown up. How they

had managed to get hold of them that quickly, nobody knew. Isaac and the others were organising the food and would be bringing it down to the plaza from time to time.

Isaac slowly awoke, trying to remember what had happened yesterday. Quite a lot had happened. Alex had left and Kraden wanted everybody to celebrate, Gareth had finally proposed to Jenna and Jenna accepted, and Ivan and Sheba had actually gotten together thanks to his and Mia's plotting... and fortunately he and Mia were still in one piece. Isaac smiled in relief, sitting up and pushing off his duvet. He could already hear voices coming from the kitchen, one of which belonged to his beloved Mia, and he recalled that they were supposed to be arranging the food, as were Gareth and Ivan, with the help of Gareth's family too. Isaac hurriedly got dressed and rushed down to the kitchen. He was taken aback by how much it had been transformed since last night, there were plates everywhere and steam all over the place, as there was food being cooked, baked, fried etc.

"Phew!" Isaac wiped his brow, sweat already beginning to build on it. "It sure is hot in here! Is there any chance of breakfast?"

"Oh, Isaac!" Mia exclaimed. She was wearing an apron and had some floury substance on her hands. "We're going to be making so much food, that you'll be so full at the end of the day, so I hope you can make it without breakfast. Want to help? Some vegetables need chopping over there." She pointed.

"I see..." Isaac looked over at his mother who was currently cutting up fruit, presumably to make a fruit salad or something. "Since when was Kraden so influential on everybody? He's got the whole village in uproar, at his beck and command!"

"It's a great occasion, Isaac," Mia smiled, waving a wooden spoon in his direction. "Now go chop those vegetables!"

"From what I've heard of that man and how pleased Mia seems to be that he's gone, this must be a good reason for all this work," Dora flashed an alligator smile and Isaac gulped. "Now do what Mia says, we can't be expected to do all the work alone, and you can't sit on your backside all day, Isaac."

"Y-Yes, Mom!" Isaac rushed over to the counter, where the chopping board was. The vegetables seemed to be grinning at him, taunting him for having to chop them up. Isaac brushed away that stupid thought and grabbed the chopping knife. "What about Dad? He's not doing anything!"

"Actually, I sent him out to buy some more eggs, milk and butter and other provisions from the shops down in the plaza," Dora replied. "We were a little low on supplies. Did you really think I'd let your father get away with doing nothing as well? Although I think he would have been happier doing nothing too."

"No, Mom, of course not..." Isaac blearily chopped away, slicing up carrots and peeling the odd potato in the sink. He had the feeling that this was going to be a very boring morning. One thing was for sure, he didn't want to commemorate yesterday as Jenna had suggested if they would have to do this every morning. Isaac picked up a limp lima bean and grimaced, wondering if the lima beans and other assorted horrible looking vegetables would be missed.

"AAAAAAHHHHH!"

The scream that rang out through the village of Vale did not come from somebody who was being murdered, but rather from somebody who had just found themselves the subject

of a rather rude awakening. The victim was currently sitting bolt upright in bed, his eyes wide with shock, his jaw hanging open, and he was absolutely dripping wet, while his older sister stood by his bed with an empty bucket cackling maniacally, and his little brother and a midget watched on, also amused by the rude awakening.

"Wh-what was that for!" Gareth threw an injured look at his older sister. "Why did you do that?" Kay quietened down, closing her mouth shut, took a good long look at her dripping wet brother and then burst out laughing all over again, unable to form a coherent sentence.

"You wouldn't wake up," Aaron giggled, bending over with his hands on his stomach as he tried to hold in his laughter long enough to answer Gareth's question. "So Sis came up with an even better way to get you up and it worked!"

"Morning, doofus," Ivan smiled cheerfully. "Don't you know what today is?"

"Shut up, midget," Gareth grumbled, wrapping his arms around himself. "I don't care what today is. Why did you have to wake me up so early?" He had just been having a pleasant dream about himself and Jenna, and he felt that it was totally unfair that he had to be woken up just like that without even a warning. "I need to have my beauty sleep, you know!"

"B-beauty sleep?" Ivan started laughing raucously. "You're kidding, aren't you?"

"You're never going to be beautiful, Gareth," Aaron threw him an apathetic look. "Why start now?"

"I don't need to listen to this rubbish," Gareth grumbled. "Just let me go back to sleep."

"Um, we can't," said Kay.

"What? Why?" Gareth almost wailed. "What have I done wrong? I haven't done anything! And you can't blackmail me anymore, because I've already proposed to Jenna, so there! Oh yeah! I proposed to Jenna, she accepted, and Felix didn't beat me up! YEAH!"

"Alex's Departure Day ring a bell?" Ivan reminded him.

"Alex's... Departure... Day?" Gareth frowned. "Oh yeah, that slimeball left the village yesterday! Jenna wanted it to be a calendar day... um, so what does it have to do with me?"

"Party!" Aaron exclaimed. "We're having a party all day, and we've got to do the food, right? So you have to help with the food! Mom, Dad, Grandma and Grandpa are already helping out, and we've got to help too just because we also happen to live in this house."

"I'm helping out too because I want to," Ivan added. "I didn't have to, but since I'm staying in this house, I might as well. You have to help out too, so get yourself out of that bed right now before we all get buckets of water."

"Hey, you don't need to threaten me!" Gareth exclaimed, quickly scrambling out of his bed and standing up, more water dripping onto the floor. "Fine, I'll help out just because I hate Alex too, but I don't want to have to do it next year, or the year after that or..."

"Be in the kitchen in about ten minutes or else," Kay ordered, walking out of the bedroom. "Or else there will be trouble!"

"Ooh, I'm scared..." Gareth muttered sarcastically. "Why does everybody have to keep telling me what to do?"

"Um, because you're a lazy oaf?" Ivan suggested.

"Get out of my room, you midget!" Gareth yelled. Ivan quickly did so, knowing fully well what happened if he actually pushed Gareth too far. It didn't help that Mia and Isaac weren't there to keep him in check either. "Sheesh..."

"Never mind, it's only just this once," Aaron smiled. "And there's going to be loads of food, which will make you very happy, won't it?"

"Er, sure," Gareth blinked. "Yeah... mmm... food..." He sighed and walked around the room, picking up various articles of clothing to wear for the day.

Soon, all the food was down in the plaza, and Gareth had already had his hand smacked with a wooden spoon several times that morning for trying to sneak some food before the actual party. He was currently nursing a bruise and whimpering to Jenna who simply told him he shouldn't have tried to sneak food into his stomach then. Then Gareth whined about how unsympathetic Jenna was being but then he realised that she was almost always like that and whining at her about it would not be good for his physical health so he immediately shut up and prayed she would not resort to extreme violence or something.

There were balloons everywhere, in all sorts of different colours and shapes, tied to the tree branches. A bird had already suffered a massive heart attack when they pecked a balloon and it exploded in their face. Mia had healed the bird and gave it a severe telling off, although she doubted it had understood a word she said. There was also a banner strung between two trees, across the top of the plaza steps. On both sides, words had been sloppily painted upon the banner, "Alex's Departure Day."

"I wish I could have helped you with the banner instead of preparing food..." Gareth grumbled, staring mournfully at his brand new bruise.

"Are you kidding?" Jenna stared weirdly at him. "You would have spelt it 'Alicks Diparshur Dey' or something!"

"Heyyy!" Gareth whined. "I can spell!"

"Really?" Ivan alighted by his side. "I thought you were the kind of person who couldn't even spell his own name!"

"We're meant to be partying not warring," Jenna stepped in front of Gareth and glared down at Ivan. "So you shift your backside elsewhere and stop picking on my fiance before I personally ensure that you get your own personal barbecue!"

"Oooh... scary..." Ivan retreated to his new girlfriend's side. "I think it must be one of Jenna's seeing red days."

"It's always one of Jenna's seeing red days..." Sheba replied. "What time of the month is to most girls, to her it's time of the week or something."

"PICARD! PICARD! PICARD!"

"Who invited them to the party?" Felix despaired as he looked upon the fangirls screaming at their idol.

"Aren't all Valeans welcome?" Picard threw him a look.

"It should have been all Valeans except fangirls," Felix shuddered. "And Gareth's creepy big sister's lurking around... at this rate, that purple-haired lunatic will probably show up out of the blue as well..." He noticed Picard staring at somebody behind him and frowned.

"Purple-haired lunatic?" said a sugar sweet voice behind Felix.

Felix slowly turned around and screamed as he realised that Feizhi was standing right behind him. "Oh... F-Feizhi!" He took a step back, shuddering. "I... I wasn't expecting you to be here... you're not Valean or anything..."

"Is he Valean?" Feizhi gestured at Picard, looking sceptical.

"Er, no," Felix admitted. "Picard is actually a Lemurian."

"Well then," Feizhi put her hands on her hips. "Then Xianese must be allowed too."

"You didn't even know Alex!" Felix desperately protested.

"Neither did most of the Valeans..." Picard muttered.

"Actually, I encounted that guy named Alex... looks like a girl, right?" Feizhi asked. Felix nodded. "Right. He was sitting on the old man's roof and talked way too much, saying stuff about his beloved Mia, and he actually dared to insult Isaac! How could he insult Isaac? Isaac's charming, gorgeous..."

"Tell that to the fangirls," Felix cut her off. "They all drool over Picard and Isaac has no fangirls. Well, apart from you, maybe."

"POW POW PICARD!"

"Now they've started with the 'Pow Pow Picard' too?" Picard strongly suspected that the author had just missed saying it, but he did not bring that up. "Oh well... they could be saying worse things than that."

"Everybody!" Isaac shouted, waving his arms for attention.
"Kraden wants to speak to us!"

"What!" Mia gasped in astonishment. "You're letting him speak? Isaac, are you out of your mind?"

"It's impossible to stop Kraden from talking..." Isaac replied.
"So the best thing we can do is listen and hope he shuts up eventually."

"Now, Isaac," Dora popped up and started scolding him. Isaac winced. "Kraden is a good man and he is very wise, so you really should listen and not complain, because you may learn something very important from him one day, if you haven't already..."

"He does have a point though," Kyle appeared and tried to defend Isaac. "Kraden talked non-stop on the way back on the ship when we were returning to Vale from Prox, he never shut up once during the journey. And I don't recall any of it being useful either."

Isaac hurriedly edged away from his parents and tried to concentrate on the rambling old man, Mia clutching tightly onto Isaac's arm and trying to convince him it would be okay, that Kraden would not talk them to death or something, which would be quite tragic, since pretty much every Valean was down there in the plaza, plus a Lemurian, a Contigan, a (kind of...) Laliveran, an Imilian and somebody from Xian. And assorted people who had the nerve to stay at the inn.

"Thank you all for taking the time to listen to me!" Kraden exclaimed as many pairs of eyes were trained upon him. He received some unenthusiastic applause and a few Boos, those who went "Boo!" were promptly told off by a parent.
"Today... or rather yesterday was a very special day, as a

slimeball villain known as Alex finally left the village! Some of you may have seen him sitting on my roof, fixing it, muttering rude stuff about Isaac!" Someone in the audience cheered and promptly screamed as Feizhi somehow got over to them, pounded them into dust then returned to her former place in a matter of seconds. "He was, in fact, a megalomaniac!" Kraden paused for dramatic effect, waiting for it to sink in. Pretty much everybody just gave him bored stares and he was disappointed to see that nobody had gasped in amazement or shock.

"That's old news..." Gareth yawned. "I knew it the second we saw him in Sol Sanctum."

"No, you didn't..." Jenna argued. "He showed no megalomaniacal tendencies then."

"Eventually, Alex finished fixing my roof and soon left, which was in fact yesterday!" Kraden exclaimed. "He had talked so much during fixing my roof that he annoyed me to the point where I push him in a pot of boiling water!"

"Kraden, push Alex in a pot of boiling water?" Felix murmured. "Don't make me laugh."

"That would be funny though..." Picard chuckled.

"He deserves it for saying all that stuff about Alex," Feizhi declared, her eyes narrowing to slits.

"I decided that we should have a party to celebrate him leaving, and that special day we shall know as Alex's Departure Day," Kraden gestured at the banner hanging above the steps. "Jenna was the one who suggested the name, and it is of course very fitting. Now, we are all ready to celebrate it, there is food for everybody and lots of

balloons! How fun! We are here to party today, and party we shall! Have fun!"

Pretty much everybody, or nearly everybody, cheered as Kraden finished talking and even clapped. Kraden thought they were applauding him for his speech, not quite realising that they were only cheering and clapping because he had finally finished his lengthy speech. Obviously some of them had never heard Alex going on and on otherwise they might have thought Kraden's speech very short. However, it was over now, so everybody surged to the tables, grabbing whatever food they could, Gareth heaping loads of food on his plate of course, despite warnings that he might get sick. As far as he was concerned, warnings were just there to spoil his fun.

"Phew... I thought he would never shut up..." Isaac chewed on a pastry, smiling. "Okay, so it wasn't that long, but it was still long."

"There's so much food," Mia munched on a slice of pie, looking up and down the table. "We're going to be eating this for months."

"Nah, Gareth will eat it all," Isaac chuckled.

"What's that about Gareth?" Jenna asked, approaching Isaac.

"Er, nothing, Jenna," Isaac chuckled nervously. "Hey, why are you looking at me like that?"

"Nothing always means something!" Jenna exclaimed.

"Everytime somebody says 'nothing' they are actually hiding something, why even bother saying nothing at all? Why not just say 'Oh, I'd rather not tell you' and be done with it? Because if you say nothing, then you are actually lying and you deserve to be burnt for it-"

"Hey, Jenna, come and try this really nice cake!" Gareth quickly pulled his girlfriend away before Jenna could inflict general bodily harm on Isaac. "I'm sure that you'll like it too!"

"Phew..." Mia smiled at her boyfriend. "That was a close one, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, we've had a few close ones lately..." Isaac glanced at the Jupiter Adepts who were currently sitting by a tree and kissing. "They could have cast Spark Plasma on us or something for what we did last night, but we got away with it."

"Well, we should retire from plotting," Mia suggested. "Especially since everybody seems to be together now."

"Well, Felix still hasn't got anybody," Isaac pointed out. "At the rate things are going, he probably won't. He's insulted the fangirls several times."

"Those fangirls give me a headache," Mia glanced at the obsessed Valean girls who were still shouting at Picard. "But I think we can take it as a sign that Picard does not need to worry about being able to find a prospective girl for himself in the future if ever he should need one, he's got a queue of suitors waiting to claim him."

"Wow, this cake really is good..." Jenna licked her lips and sucked at her fingers. "Who made it?"

"Isaac's mom, I think," Gareth answered. "She's a good cook."

"Well, aren't you two all loved up?" A voice cut into their conversation and they turned to see Kay smiling like an alligator at them. "Garet, I really enjoyed making you do the

chores and I do hope you will do them more often from now on."

"Yeah right," Gareth grimaced. "Just because I live in that house, I should do chores?"

"Yep," Jenna answered. "You can't expect girls or women to do the chores all the time, Gareth! Men should do their fair share of the work around the house too, if they don't then they are just lazy, incompetent imbeciles and they really should be fed to a crocodile or-"

"Still want to marry her, Gareth?" Kay chuckled maniacally and walked away, shaking with laughter.

"Of course I do!" Gareth exclaimed. "Now, Jenna, when we get married and have our own house, perhaps we could... compromise on chores?"

"Yeah, you do all the chores, I'll put my feet up and do nothing," Jenna smiled. "Role reversal sounds fun, doesn't it?"

"Yikes..." Gareth sweatdropped.

"This is a nice party," Ivan snuggled up to Sheba while munching on a slice of chocolate cake. "Free food and not having to do any work. It's been a hectic week, hasn't it? We've had plotting, wars and I've dabbled in slavery. Very fun."

"And we finally came clean," Sheba smiled, resting her head on Ivan's shoulder. "I didn't really think it would ever happen, did you?"

"Nah..." Ivan chuckled. "I was terrified, weren't you?"

"You were? I couldn't even tell..." Sheba grinned. "Me too, I guess. But that kiss was really something, wasn't it? And then Isaac and Mia just exposed themselves like that... we didn't even have to punish them for it because everything had gone so well."

"I guess we owe them huh?" Ivan wiped his mouth. "If it wasn't for them, I doubt we'd be a couple yet."

"Well, all's well that ends well..." said Sheba. "We're a couple, so are Isaac and Mia. Garek and Jenna are engaged, Picard's got about a million fangirls to pick from but poor Felix is still lonely. Whatever are we going to do with him?"

"I don't know," Ivan mused. "Maybe he's better off left to his own devices, he can be pretty temperamental if provoked."

"He's not that bad," Sheba protested. "Just needs careful persuasion."

"POW POW PICARD! POW POW PICARD!"

Picard sighed as the Valean fangirls continued to scream insanely at him. At this rate they might never leave him alone, but at least he knew how to make them quiet down for a bit. He grinned and walked up to the fangirls, looking as charming as he possibly could.

"My dear fangirls- I mean, beautiful girls," Picard hastily corrected himself. "It is my pleasure to have you all within my presence, there is nothing that makes me happier." At once all the fangirls screamed and fainted to the ground. The Lemurian shook his head and walked away, leaving them all lying on the ground in sheer bliss at the thought of being able to make Picard very happy just by being there.

"Typical Lemurian," Felix muttered, biting into a lamington. "Making them all faint just like that. Why couldn't he have done that to all the monsters we battled on our journey? Might have made it a bit easier... especially in that fight against my parents and Isaac's dad... I mean, the Doom Dragon."

"Your parents fought you as a dragon?" Feizhi overheard Felix talking to himself and stared in amazement. "How did they do that?"

"Got turned into a dragon by a rock with an eye," replied Felix, looking very serious.

"Er... okay..." Feizhi frowned and looked away. "You Valeans have... very weird things happen to you. And I thought that woman always carrying water was insane. I should probably just go home when the party's over, I don't want to get crushed by a boulder or something."

"... Just who have you been talking to?" Felix asked. "Vale's not that dangerous! Honest... I think... well... sort of... not usually..."

"Apparently, it's very common to see a rock or a boulder rolling around the village, and seeing the mountain erupt..." Feizhi looked wide-eyed. "Isn't that true? That girl, Sheba, told me so, she said it was very dangerous here."

"You just got to be careful," Felix finished off his lamington. "If you fall foul of a disaster and are lucky, you'll probably just get picked up by people and held hostage in a faraway village for three years while people think you're dead. People in Vale are very pessimistic, they don't bother to look for the body. Well, I think they did, but I never asked... but you should find the body before you say they're dead."

"I see," Feizhi was disturbed. "That's very nice, thank you for, er, trying to assure me that this village's safe... I'm grateful to you. But regardless, I should set off back to Xian sometime, my father may actually worry about me although I doubt it. I've had a very nice time here and I hope to come back sometime in the future. I think I shall go pack now. Bye."

"Bye," Felix replied, reaching out for a meringue. Feizhi stared at him for a moment then shook her head and set off towards the inn. Felix quietly sighed in relief and wondered if he could convince everybody to celebrate 'Feizhi's Departure Day'. Probably not, Feizhi wasn't exactly hated while Alex was.

"So Feizhi's off, then?" Picard walked over, watching the purple-haired girl go to the inn. "I actually thought for a moment you two could be a couple or something, but obviously you don't intend to be sometime soon."

"No way, she scares me witless," Felix protested. "Besides, she loves Isaac even if he loves Mia. Well, you know what they say, love really does bite, she's just got to deal with it and move on, and not in my general direction, thank you very much. It was already embarrassing enough when she actually thought I was Isaac."

"Even if love bites, things have gone pretty well," Picard indicated Isaac and Mia, Gareth and Jenna, Ivan and Sheba. "Matches made in heaven, aren't they?" He reached behind him and got hold of a sandwich.

"We'll find out," Felix answered. "Although I have little interest in affairs of the heart, but it seems I have been constantly exposed to such things, so there's nothing I can do but just watch it all take its course. And don't you ever

try plotting against me, because I'll be a lot less forgiving than Ivan and Sheba of Isaac and Mia, rest assured."

"That's a shame, because there's one or two fangirls I might want to try to offload on you," Picard broke off at Felix's demonic glare. "But obviously you're not looking yet. I guess we'll just have to be two happy bachelors for a while, hmm?"

"Yes, that suits me fine... just for a while..." Felix responded, watching as Isaac and Mia embraced passionately, going from kissing to snogging to frenching in just a few seconds, then Garet and Jenna proceeded to do exactly the same thing. It wasn't long before Ivan and Sheba proceeded to do the same, all of them eagerly looking forwards to the future that lay ahead of them.